

Making Wilderness Work: Frank Church and the American Wilderness Movement

SARA DANT

The author is a member of the history department at Weber State University.

Idaho Senator Frank Church (served 1957–1981) is one of the most important and underappreciated participants in the politics of the American wilderness movement. Church neither originated the wilderness idea nor crafted the language of the original Wilderness Act, but he made wilderness work. Although his legislative compromises and pragmatic politics sometimes infuriated wilderness purists, they were essential to the passage of all three wilderness bills: the Wilderness Act of 1964, the Eastern Wilderness Areas Act of 1974, and the Endangered American Wilderness Act of 1978. As his legislative record demonstrates, Church was not only at the vanguard of the evolving definition of wilderness in America but also established a viable process for designating wilderness areas. Church's coalition-building vision of wilderness as a communally defined natural space, not necessarily "untrammelled by man," became the standard for wilderness designation, and his enduring legacy is a model of citizen cooperation.

It was the evening of April 27, 1977, and the Idaho senator was down on his hands and knees in a motel room in Lewiston poring over maps of central Idaho. As clouds of smoke from his huge cigar filled the air, Frank Church fired off questions to wilderness advocates about the ranges for bighorn sheep and elk, fisheries, and snowmobile trails in the region known as the Gospel-Hump. These environmentalists were clamoring for a wilderness designation in the area, but local ranching and timber interests had remained hostile, leaving the region's natural resources and economy in legal limbo. At the Grangeville Chamber of Commerce breakfast that morning, frustrated members demanded, "why can't somebody step in and make a decision?" Frank Church did. In the process, he developed a coalition-building approach to federal

The author wishes to thank the following people for their help and support in the research and writing of this article, as well as the dissertation on which it draws: LeRoy Ashby, Dale Goble, Fred Hutchison, Doug Scott, Alan Virta, Mark Harvey, Dan Flores, and the late Hal Rothman.

Pacific Historical Review, Vol. 77, No. 2, pages 237–272. ISSN 0030-8684

© 2008 by the Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved.

Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Rights and Permissions website, at <http://www.ucpressjournals.com/reprintinfo.asp> DOI: [pbr.2008.77.2.237](http://dx.doi.org/10.1215/00308684-2008-77.2).

wilderness designation that continues to serve as a powerful model well into the twenty-first century.¹

The next day, despite warnings that he was a “marked man” in nearby Grangeville, Church convened a wary collection of conservationists, timber industry representatives, and Grangeville locals to negotiate the boundaries of a new wilderness area. The ground rules he laid were simple: There would be a Gospel-Hump wilderness; the areas not designated as wilderness would be released for multiple use; and the participants themselves would negotiate the details and pledge their honor not to violate the spirit of whatever accord was reached. After setting the process in motion, Church stepped aside and let this unlikely coalition hammer out the details. Local residents waited anxiously, convinced that environmentalists were “tying up the timber supply,” but instead, after several months of intense negotiations, a workable compromise emerged that pleased both environmentalists and local leaders.² A year later their proposal became part of the Endangered American Wilderness Act, which set aside the 206,000-acre Gospel-Hump Wilderness and released nearly 140,000 acres for multiple-use management. The compromise was vintage Church.

Over the course of his four Senate terms, from 1957 to 1981, Church often wrestled with balancing the conflicting demands for resource use and preservation in Idaho. He had entered the U.S. Senate at a critical juncture, a time when the nation’s values began to shift decisively away from extraction and exploitation and toward environmental preservation. Church both shaped and was shaped by this national sentiment that increasingly counted a healthy environment as an integral part of the good life and a measure of a higher standard of living. The Senator also established a kind of symbiotic relationship with environmental organizations such as the Sierra Club: He needed their more radical positions to make him appear moderate in an increasingly conservative Idaho, while they needed him to craft the political compromises necessary to

1. Fred Hutchison, interview by Rod Gramer, Aug. 6, 1984, MSS 173, Tape 89, LeRoy Ashby and Rod Gramer Collection, Boise State University, Boise, Idaho (hereafter Ashby-Gramer Collection). This smoky pre-meeting with the conservation negotiating team included Dennis Baird, Chair of the Northern Rockies Chapter of the Sierra Club; Mort Brigham, Idaho Wildlife Federation; Dan Lechefsky, Wilderness Society; and Doug Scott, Northwest Representative, Sierra Club. Doug Scott to author, Feb. 18, 2007, copy in author’s possession.

2. Hutchison interview.

achieve environmental protection. In the end, however, Church did not embrace environmental concerns because they were fashionable, but because he genuinely believed they were right.³

In many ways, the April 1977 scene in Grangeville, Idaho, captured the essence of Church's philosophy regarding the environment: a willingness to negotiate combined with a determination to set aside some of Idaho's—and the nation's—last best places. Nowhere was this influence more evident than in his career-long campaign for wilderness. Frank Church did not originate the idea, and his words are not enshrined in the language of the original Wilderness Act, but Frank Church made wilderness work. A somewhat reluctant but early convert to the wilderness movement, he became one of its greatest champions. While his compromises sometimes infuriated wilderness purists, they were essential to the passage of all three wilderness bills: the Wilderness Act of 1964, the Eastern Wilderness Areas Act of 1974, and the Endangered American Wilderness Act of 1978. As Church's legislative record demonstrates, the Idaho Senator was not only at the vanguard of the evolving definition of wilderness in America, but he also established a viable process for designating wilderness areas that worked then and continues to work today. In time, Church's vision of wilderness as a communally defined natural space, not necessarily "untrammeled by man," became the standard for wilderness designation.⁴

When Church first entered the Senate in 1957, however, he was a confirmed conservationist in the vein of Theodore Roosevelt and Gifford Pinchot. In 1910 Pinchot had articulated a vision of utilitarian efficiency when he wrote that "conservation means the greatest good to the greatest number for the longest time."⁵ Church's liberal, New Deal-Democrat philosophy reinforced this doctrine and made him a strong advocate for federal, as opposed

3. Ralph W. Hansen and Deborah J. Roberts, *The Frank Church Papers: A Summary Guide* (Boise, Idaho, 1988), 32.

4. *The Wilderness Act of 1964* (Public Law 88-577), *Statutes At Large* 78 (1964), 891.

5. Gifford Pinchot, "The Birth of 'Conservation,'" in Roderick Frazier Nash, ed., *American Environmentalism: Readings in Conservation History* (New York, 1990), 78. Samuel Hays has argued that the Gifford Pinchot/Theodore Roosevelt idea of conservation grew out of the concern of technical experts and managers for reducing waste in the production of natural resources and that it had a limited popular base. The environmental movement that appeared by the 1960s, by contrast, "arose out of broad public interest in improving the quality of life and thus had widespread support." Samuel P. Hays, "Conservation and Environmental Movements," in Eric Foner and John A. Garraty, eds., *The Reader's Companion to American History* (Boston, 1991), 220.

to private, resource development.⁶ Indeed, the focus of Church's 1956 Senate campaign was the development of Idaho and the need to attract industry. He also sought to secure the multiple-use reclamation programs that could make his arid state bloom. Promising to "build your Idaho," Church argued that the key to success was federal development of the state's abundant natural resources. Idaho, he said, was "like a young giant," and he cautioned against stunting future growth "with small plans for small tomorrows."⁷ On election day, Church scored a decisive upset over his Republican opponent, incumbent Herman Welker, capturing 56.2 percent of the vote, even as the Republican presidential candidate, Dwight Eisenhower, swept the state.⁸

Church's upset victory surprised many, including Senate Majority Leader Lyndon Johnson, the Texas Democrat who had withheld his endorsement during the campaign. Sensing that the powerful Texan was now "recovering for lost time," Church lobbied for favorable committee assignments, noting his preference "above all others" for Interior and Insular Affairs.⁹ Johnson acquiesced. The appointment, however, placed Church on a collision course with many high-profile environmental bills that challenged his traditional conservation ideals. Significantly, in the fall of 1961, Church found himself suddenly thrust into the limelight of one of the most controversial bills in the Senate: the Wilderness Act. Legislation to set aside federal wilderness areas, introduced by Minnesota Democrat Hubert Humphrey, had been maneuvering around in Con-

6. For a more thorough discussion of Frank Church's dedication to New Deal liberalism, see LeRoy Ashby and Rod Gramer, *Fighting the Odds: The Life of Senator Frank Church* (Pullman, Wash., 1994), 13, 26–27. For Church's position on public versus private development, see Sara E. Dant Ewert, "Evolution of an Environmentalist: Senator Frank Church and the Hells Canyon Controversy," *Montana: The Magazine of Western History*, 51 (Spring 2001), 36–51.

7. Utahna L. Hall, "In the New Senate," *Washington Post*, Jan. 3, 1957; Frank Church, "Build Your Idaho," 1956 campaign video, 56/11.1/1/#56001, Frank Church Papers, Boise State University, Boise, Idaho (hereafter Church Papers). The extensive Church Papers are archived by manuscript collection number (56), series within the collection (e.g., 11.1 above), box number (e.g., 1 above), and then file or video number (e.g., #56001 above). These strings of numbers will allow researchers to access the relevant materials.

8. Boyd A. Martin, *Idaho Voting Trends: Party Realignment and Percentage of Votes for Candidates, Parties and Elections, 1890–1974* (Moscow, Idaho, 1975), 278.

9. Paige E. Mulhollan, *Transcript, Frank Church Oral History Interview*, May 1, 1969, p. 2, Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library, Austin, Texas; Frank Church to Lyndon Johnson, Nov. 24, 1956, copy in author's possession.

gress since 1956.¹⁰ Church knew that the wilderness proposal incited strong opposition among natural resource interests, so he had quietly avoided publicizing his support of the measure, preferring instead to work behind the scenes.

Yet Church was a supporter, and his affinity for wilderness grew out of his deep appreciation for the wild Idaho of his youth. Born in 1924, Church was a third-generation Idahoan who spent his boyhood recreating with family and friends throughout the scenically spectacular and sparsely populated state. A military stint abroad during World War II only deepened his appreciation for home. "Wherever else we may live," Church wrote home to his future wife Bethine Clark, "however fond we may become of another place, or of many others, there lingers an appetite only Idaho can appease." Two years later, in June 1947, Frank and Bethine exchanged their wedding vows on the front porch of her family's Robinson Bar Ranch, located in the heart of Idaho's Salmon River country. The couple and their friends returned often to this mountain retreat to fish, ride horses, swim in the hot pools, and recreate far from the hectic pace of Washington, D.C. As Church liked to remind people, "I never knew a person who felt self-important in the morning after spending the night in the open on an Idaho mountainside under a star-studded summer sky."¹¹ During his Senate career, Church sought to achieve what he believed was a practicable balance between development and preservation. While he consistently secured reclamation projects for his home state and remained committed throughout his tenure to supporting multiple-use projects when the benefits clearly outweighed preservation, Church also believed that the untamed, natural landscapes of his Idaho childhood—Hells Canyon, the Sawtooths, the Selway-Bitterroot, the Middle Fork Salmon—were areas of superlative beauty that deserved protection

10. Senator Hubert Humphrey introduced the first wilderness bill, S. 4013, on June 7, 1956. Senators Richard Neuberger (Democrat of Oregon), Wayne Morse (Republican of Oregon), Margaret Chase Smith (Republican of Maine), Herbert Lehman (Democrat of New York), James Duff (Republican of Pennsylvania), Paul Douglas (Democrat of Illinois), Thomas Kuchel (Republican of California), Karl Mundt (Republican of South Dakota), and William Laird (Democrat of West Virginia) joined in sponsoring the measure. Craig W. Allin, *The Politics of Wilderness Preservation* (Westport, Conn., 1982), 105.

11. Ashby and Gramer, *Fighting the Odds*, 23. On Frank Church as a young man, see *ibid.*, 1–17; Bethine Church, telephone interview by author, Feb. 18, 2007; inscription on Frank Church's tombstone in Boise, Idaho.

from development and destruction. His commitment to a national wilderness system grew directly from this personal conviction.

In early 1961 Clinton Anderson, Democrat of New Mexico, had introduced a much-revised version of the wilderness bill that established a National Wilderness Preservation System limited to three types of federal lands already withdrawn for recreational use: national forest lands classified as “wilderness,” “wild,” “canoe,” or “primitive”; roadless areas of at least 5,000 acres contained within national parks and monuments; and selected portions of wildlife refuges and game ranges. All lands in the first category would immediately become part of the system upon enactment of the bill, even though the Forest Service, upon review of primitive areas only, could exclude any part that proved more suitable for development. The wilderness system would incorporate lands in the other categories as recommended by the President and approved by Congress.¹² Although much of Anderson’s bill was new, opposition to it was not. Some Idaho residents complained that the wilderness bill “smells of communism” and would benefit only “a handful of millionaires and bird watchers.” Another letter writer cautioned Church to “remember that timber is a crop, and shouldn’t be locked up to rot.”¹³

Mindful of these critics, in March 1961 Church sought to break the Interior Committee log-jam that held the bill back by offering three key compromise amendments. Collectively, the modifications clarified and strengthened Congress’s role in approving or disapproving presidential recommendations for wilderness designation and provided for mineral surveying that was “not incompatible with the preservation of the wilderness environment.”¹⁴ A rash of criticism ensued, but this time from preservationists who accused Church of “working to sabotage and wreak havoc” by “emasculating” the bill. Church assured them of his intentions, explaining that his amendments did no “violence to the wilderness concept.” In particular, Howard Zahniser of the Wilderness Society had been skeptical of Church’s proposals, especially since the Forest Service

12. *Congressional Record—Senate*, Sept. 6, 1961, p. 3, found in 56/7.9/13/5, Church Papers. Church often included copies of clippings from the *Congressional Record* in mailings to constituents and his newsletter; hence, the archival citation.

13. Philip W. Jungert, “Protest Against the Wilderness Plan,” Feb. 21, 1961, Douglas D. DeWalt to Clinton Anderson, March 7, 1961, and Carl Pease to Frank Church, March 7, 1961, all in 56/1.1/151/20, Church Papers.

14. *Congressional Record*, March 28, 1961, p. 2, in 56/7.9/13/4, in *ibid.*

had drafted the language. But in a meeting between the two men that spring, Church convinced Zahniser that the purpose of the amendments was not to imperil the bill but to overcome the acute hostility of some members of the Senate Interior Committee: "I hope the success of the cause of creating a permanent wilderness system will not be jeopardized by a failure on the part of its advocates to recognize that some give and take is necessary."¹⁵ The committee approved the bill, with Church's amendments, in July in an eleven to four vote. Anderson, the bill's chief sponsor, commended Church for his "brilliant mind backed by true courage" and thanked him "for a wonderful performance in a tough situation." Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall later recalled that "Senator Church really stood out on that committee" for his leadership on wilderness.¹⁶

Once the bill moved out of the Interior Committee, however, Church was destined to play an even more active role in its passage. Church's hopes of quietly voting "yea" evaporated when Anderson suffered a gall bladder attack on the eve of the floor debate for the wilderness bill and asked Church to take control. Anderson later recalled that Church "was willing enough to support the bill because he believed in it, but he was not happy at the prospect of offending his constituents gratuitously by leading the floor fight for it." The previous year, for example, the freshman Senator had set off warning bells among his state's resource interest groups by floating the idea of a Sawtooth National Park, provoking immediate condemnation from the Idaho Cattlemen's Association, various sporting groups, several chambers of commerce, and the Bannock County Farm Bureau. Despite warnings from his staff that he was courting political danger, Church accepted the responsibility for managing the Wilderness Act.¹⁷

15. For criticism, see Raymond Mostek to Frank Church, June 23, 1961, 56/1.1/152/4, Church Papers; H. Frank Evans to Frank Church, April 15, 1961, p. 2, in *ibid.*; Frank Church to L. L. Anderson, May 26, 1961, in *ibid.*; Frank Church to Bruce Bowler, June 15, 1961, 56/1.1/152/6, in *ibid.*; Frank Church to Bill Duff, June 6, 1961, 56/1.1/152/2, in *ibid.*

16. For a more positive assessment, see Clinton Anderson to Frank Church, July 14, 1961, 56/10.3/1/4, in *ibid.*; Stewart Udall, interview by Rod Gramer, June 11, 1979, MSS 173, Rod Gramer Collection, Boise State University, Boise, Idaho (hereafter Gramer Collection).

17. Clinton P. Anderson, *Outsider in the Senate: Senator Clinton Anderson's Memoirs* (New York, 1970), 233; Sara E. Dant Ewert, "The Conversion of Senator Frank Church: Evolution of an Environmentalist" (Ph.D. dissertation, Washington State University, 2000), 27; Ashby and Gramer, *Fighting the Odds*, 146.

If Church was reluctant, he did not show it in his September 5 defense of wilderness in the Senate. His theme reflected the idea that these lands, although perhaps commercially worthless, were scenically priceless. He began by methodically addressing the main arguments of the bill's opponents. Although western states would bear the brunt of the wilderness designations, he acknowledged, they would also be "its chief beneficiaries," not "rich easterners" as detractors alleged: "It is in the West alone that a person can still escape the clutter of roads, signposts, and managed picnic grounds." Moreover, the areas covered by the pending bill had already been set aside in their primitive state as national parks and monuments, wildlife refuges and ranges, or Forest Service Primitive Areas. The wilderness legislation would not change this situation and so would have "no adverse effect on anyone." Furthermore, he added, the Senate Interior Committee had been careful to preserve states rights within the wilderness system.¹⁸

Church still had to convince his own constituents of the value of wilderness. Turning his attention closer to home, Church reminded Idahoans that "the federal government, which once owned all of Idaho, still owns nearly two-thirds of it." He promised to oppose any pending legislation that threatened the livelihood of the people of Idaho: "I support the multiple-use principle in the administration of our public lands wherever it makes sense, that is, wherever the land is suited for multiple use." The wilderness bill, he argued, would actually benefit the timber and mining industries of Idaho because of its potential to release from their "locked-up" status lands deemed more suitable for multiple-use. Yet even those lands retained as wilderness would not be useless, he argued. Instead, "wilderness areas will become a mighty magnet for the tourist trade . . . few industries have as much potential for us."¹⁹

Church reserved his final words of the day to address the most "ridiculous" argument—that a wilderness designation was "classist legislation" that represented "creeping socialism." Those who enjoyed the nation's primitive areas were not just the elites, but "ordinary farmers, ordinary working people, ordinary hunters and fish-

18. *Congressional Record—Senate*, Sept. 5, 1961, p. 1, in 56/7.9/13/5, Church Papers. Frank Church explained that the wilderness bill did not change the application of state water laws, nor did it interfere with a state's jurisdiction over fish and wildlife in those parts of the national forests that became wilderness areas.

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 1, 2.

ermen.” Organized and sometimes expensive expeditions were, of course, available to those of means, but one did not have to go to the center of a primitive area to enjoy it. “Where does such an area begin?” Church asked philosophically. “It begins where the road ends; and if the roads never end, there never will be any wilderness.” He reminded the Senate that the federal government already owned and managed all of the land involved. He found it regrettable that such a “reasonable and constructive” measure had been subjected to “heated and ill-considered attacks.” Instead, “people who cry creeping socialism” should applaud the wilderness bill, for one of its chief virtues was that it rightly placed control of these lands back in the hands of the elected representatives of the people—the President and the legislature. Unfortunately, Church lamented, few had read the actual provisions of the bill, with the predictable result that alarmists on both sides had engulfed the wilderness bill in “a storm of nonsense.”²⁰

As the bill came to a vote, Church knew his defense of wilderness had been a risky re-election gamble. While his colleagues praised his “political courage,” numerous pressure groups in Idaho warned him that he had dug his “political grave” with wilderness. As his legislative assistant later remarked, Church was “always willing to take a lot of risks when it came to wilderness.”²¹ On September 6, 1961, the Senate voted seventy-eight to eight in favor of the bill; Idaho’s senior Senator, Republican Henry Dworshak, was one of the eight opposed. John Carver, then Assistant Secretary of the Interior, characterized Church’s management of the wilderness bill as “just absolutely superb” and personally congratulated him on his “magnificent job,” writing that “I am sure the lopsided vote was due in large part to your own contributions to the debate.” While Church acknowledged that Anderson deserved credit for “the big endorsement” for the bill, the director of the Wilderness Society noted that Church had “certainly furnished the needed rescue work at the last.”²²

20. *Ibid.*, 2.

21. Frank Church to William F. Johnston, Sept. 30, 1961, p. 1, in 56/1.1/152/5, Church Papers; Hutchison interview.

22. John A. Carver, Jr., interview by William Moss, Sept. 23, 1969, p. 97, in John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, Boston; Carver to Frank Church, Sept. 7, 1961, 56/1.1/152/5 Church Papers; Olaus J. Murie to “Pierre” [Albert Van S. Pulling], Sept. 12, 1961, in *ibid.*

Accolades and acrimony soon poured into Church's office. Wilderness advocates heaped praise on the senator, calling him "one of the most eloquent champions" of the bill and commending his "skill and leadership" in repelling "crippling amendments." In a letter to the editor of the *Idaho State Journal* of Pocatello, voter Albert Pulling noted that "the lands concerned are not Idaho lands. They belong to the people, and every citizen, anywhere, has the same rights on them as any other citizen." Objecting to the "castigation" leveled at Church for supporting wilderness, Pulling argued, "you can't have everything, but we have Senator Church, and thank God for that. He has the making of a great conservationist. I—a Republican—will vote for him until I am too feeble to mark 'X.'"²³ Church's potential as an environmentalist was precisely what worried opponents, who accused the senator of "selling Idaho down the river." After calling him a "dumb bunny," one man asked Church, "just who do you think you are anyway, Mr. Kruschew [*sic*] personally?" "You had better straighten out and quit lying," he warned, or "better yet go straight to Russia where I think you belong."²⁴ Looking ahead to the reelection campaign, Church's father-in-law, former Idaho Governor Chase Clark, was skeptical: "You don't just have rocks on your mind, you've got rocks in your head!" "Tell me, Frank," he asked, "how do you expect to win? All the organizations that count are against you: the cattlemen, the woolgrowers, the mining association, the forest products industry, the newspapers, the chambers of commerce." It was a fair question. Idaho had never reelected a Democrat. As one political analyst wrote, in 1962 the "Republicans rubbed their hands with glee" and "lined up" to take on Church.²⁵

But Church's maverick stand on wilderness had tapped into an emerging tide of environmental appreciation that, at least in 1962, did not significantly alienate Idaho voters. He enjoyed the strong backing of ordinary citizens throughout the state and had

23. For positive comments, see the *Wilderness Society* (newsletter), Oct. 16, 1961, p. 2, in 56/1.1/152/4, Church Papers; Carl W. Buchheister to Frank Church, Sept. 13, 1961, 56/1.1/152/5, in *ibid.*; Thomas L. Kimball to Frank Church, Sept. 8, 1961, in *ibid.*; Pulling to Adam Hyde, [*Pocatello*] *Idaho State Journal*, Sept. 19, 1961, in *ibid.*

24. Mattie McCarter to Frank Church, Sept. 23, 1961, 56/1.1/152/3, in *ibid.*; DeWalt to Frank Church, Dec. 20, 1961, 56/1.1/152/2, in *ibid.*

25. Frank Church, "Whither Wilderness?" *American Forests* (July 1977), 12; *Congressional Record*, March 25, 1977, p. 1, in 56/7.9/13/6, Church Papers; Randy Stapilus, *Paradox Politics: People and Power in Idaho* (Boise, Idaho, 1988), 37.

carefully cultivated voter loyalty by directing his aides to answer all correspondence within twenty-four hours. As a former staffer commented, "he took care of his constituents," and so they were willing to disagree with him. Church later recalled that his response to his father-in-law's query was simply, "well, maybe the people will not be against me. And they weren't—I won."²⁶

Given the political risks that Church had incurred backing the wilderness bill in 1961, he was most frustrated by its failure in the House in 1962. The bill faced the stiff opposition of House Interior Committee Chair Wayne Aspinall, a Democrat from western Colorado. Stewart Udall remarked that "Aspinall in those days was pretty much a one-man show . . . and the only way we could force Aspinall's hand was to pass the Senate bill by an overwhelming margin and then hold his feet to the fire."²⁷ The bill's strongest advocate in the House, Republican John Saylor of Pennsylvania, placed full responsibility for the bill's failure on Aspinall and his committee: "Their refusal [to consider the bill] is due to the fear that when the House has the opportunity to work its will, the result will not be of their choosing."²⁸ Congress adjourned in October. The wilderness bill was never placed on the House calendar.

Undaunted by the Aspinall obstacle, Church and Senate advocates re-introduced the wilderness legislation in the Senate in January 1963. Added to the growing list of support for the bill was the 1962 report of the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission (ORRRC). Congress had created this bipartisan commission in 1958 to assess the nation's outdoor recreation potential, and Aspinall and others were sure the report would not support a strong wilderness bill. They were wrong. The ORRRC not only urged Congress to set aside wilderness but also recommended that it include severe restrictions on mining and water development in these areas. Buoyed by this mandate, the wilderness bill quickly moved to the Senate floor in April, where Church again managed the debate, deflecting numerous debilitating amendments before the

26. Rick Raphael, interview by LeRoy Ashby, Jan. 21, 1988, copy in author's possession; Carol Payne and Margaret Carpenter, *Ralph Nader Congress Project: Citizens Look at Congress: Frank Church, Democratic Senator from Idaho* (Washington, D.C., 1972), p. 15, in 56/10.6/4/15, Church Papers.

27. Stewart Udall interview.

28. Allin, *The Politics of Wilderness Preservation*, 128–129.

Senate passed the measure by a thumping seventy-three to twelve majority.²⁹

Yet, despite the bill's success in the Senate, trouble was still brewing in the House. Fierce competition over the parameters of wilderness produced many wilderness bills; by April 1964 there were twenty-four different versions in the House. Historian Craig Allin has noted that these bills fell into three broad groups. The first included S. 4, the Senate-passed measure, and several similar measures, most notably Congressman Saylor's HR 930. Favored by many conservation organizations, these bills had little hope of emerging from the Interior Committee since they contained none of Aspinall's demands from the previous year. The second group of bills also included a Saylor proposal, HR 9070, which combined a strong wilderness bill with concessions to Aspinall, namely complete congressional control over the system. The third group, typified by Michigan Democrat John Dingell's HR 9162, was most closely allied with natural resource interests.³⁰ In any form, the main challenge to the wilderness bill came from Aspinall. Many believed the Dingell proposal had the best chance of clearing the committee. But some closed-door maneuvering between Clinton Anderson and Aspinall finally cleared the way for a stronger wilderness proposal, and on July 30, 1964, the "controversial" wilderness bill passed the House by a remarkable 374 to 1 vote.³¹

As a member of the conference committee appointed to resolve the differences between the Senate and House versions of the wilderness bill, Church found himself allied with both Saylor and Anderson. Although he would have liked "to have retained all of the

29. *Ibid.*, 126; *Congressional Record—Senate*, April 8, 1963, pp. 5553, 5554, 5555, and *ibid.*, April 9, 1963, p. 5597, both in 56/7.9/13/5, Church Papers. Clinton Anderson consistently and graciously paired his vote with Republican Gordon L. Allott of Colorado, who was absent due to a family emergency, stating that he would suspend his "aye" vote and "pair" it with Allott's assumed "nay."

30. Like John Saylor's HR 9070, John Dingell's bill immediately set aside wilderness, wild, and canoe areas and proposed a ten-year review period for primitive, park, and refuge areas. Unlike Saylor's bill, however, Dingell's proposal did not protect the status of the latter areas beyond the ten-year period and did allow mining. Allin, *The Politics of Wilderness Preservation*, 131–132.

31. That summer Clinton Anderson promised Wayne Aspinall that he would accede to the House provision governing the incorporation of primitive areas if Aspinall would release the bill from committee. Richard Allan Baker, *Conservation Politics: The Senate Career of Clinton P. Anderson* (Albuquerque, 1985), 217; Allin, *The Politics of Wilderness Preservation*, 135. The one "nay" was Texas Democrat Joe R. Pool.

Senate version," Church knew that some compromise was necessary to secure final House approval.³² Confident that the Forest Service had sufficiently controlled mining entry in wild, wilderness, and primitive areas, Church and the Senate conferees allowed mineral prospecting to continue for the next nineteen years, down from the twenty-five years in the House version. In place of the 5,000-acre minimum specified in the House version, the conference committee agreed to a statement of intent that a wilderness area must be of "sufficient size to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition."³³ On August 20, 1964, both the Senate and House agreed to the Conference Report, and on September 3, President Lyndon Johnson signed the bill into law.

While Church certainly did not initiate the Wilderness Act, his central role in the wilderness fight had not gone unnoticed. Former Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall listed him as "one of the two or three people in Congress" deserving the greatest credit for its passage, while Stewart Udall's brother, Arizona Representative Morris "Mo" Udall, a Democrat, stated simply that, without Church, "there would have been no Wilderness Bill." In December 1965 Church received the Idaho Wildlife Federation's "Idaho Conservationist of the Year Award" and the annual "Governor's Award." Both commended his "outstanding leadership" in the preservation of Idaho's pristine Upper Priest Lake and his contributions on behalf of Wilderness, Wild and Scenic Rivers, and the Land and Water Conservation Fund. The following month the National Wildlife Federation presented Church with their "National Conservation Legislative Award," citing his "significant Congressional leadership" in the wilderness fight and his "exceptional statesmanship and skill in focusing public attention on the need for preserving wild rivers, parks, and outdoor recreation facilities."³⁴

Yet Church's wilderness advocacy necessitated a delicate balancing act. As his biographers have noted, "caught between ardent environmentalists and Idaho's mining, logging, and private power

32. Frank Church to Art Manley, Aug. 18, 1964, in 56/1.1/152/15, Church Papers.

33. Baker, *Conservation Politics*, 219.

34. Stewart Udall interview; Mo Udall, interview by Rod Gramer, June 8, 1979, Ashby-Gramer Collection. *Congressional Record—Senate*, Jan. 24, 1966, p. 907, 56/7.9/12/6, Church Papers; National Wildlife Federation, "Press Release," Jan. 11, 1966, in *ibid.*

interests, Church was hard pressed to please anyone." A lobbyist with a national conservation organization contended that "Church is not going far enough, but if you consider his constituency, he's doing pretty well." Church admitted that "the major difficulty has been trying to find the proper balance between needed development of our nation's resources to maintain full employment and prosperity on the one hand and improve and preserve the quality of human life and the environment on the other." Still, pollster Elmo Roper characterized Church in 1968 as "an outstanding conservationist, whose feeling for the open West in which he grew up has been translated into concern for the balanced development of its resources."³⁵ For Church, this elusive balance included an ever-deepening commitment to the preservation ethic of the growing environmental movement.

Moreover, by the late 1960s Church believed that most of his Idaho constituents would support environmental legislation as long as they did not view it as a threat to their livelihood: "If it is really a choice of conservation or their job, they'll take their job; but as long as it is sensible conservation and propaganda about loss of their jobs that they can sort out, they'll take conservation." He was also careful to cater to his conservative constituency on issues like gun control, and voters respected his integrity and his independent stance against the Johnson administration, which was very unpopular by 1968. After a meeting in New Meadows, for example, a cattleman assured Bethine Church that she "needn't worry. I'll be for your man—but I'll be damned if I'll be for L.B.J." That election year, the conservative *Idaho Statesman* broke precedent and backed Church, arguing that "no Senator from Idaho since [William] Borah has commanded so much respect in the Senate or the nation." Even in conservative, Republican Payette, Idaho, one publisher confessed that there was "a lot of sentiment that he's the best senator we've had in years."³⁶

35. Ashby and Gramer, *Fighting the Odds*, 353; Payne and Carpenter, *Ralph Nader Congress Project*, 15; the "national conservation association" cited in the study is not named. "Congress Project Member of Congress Questionnaire," Question #180, no date given but August 1972, in 56/10.6/4/14, Church Papers; Elmo Roper, "A Tale of Two Senates," *Lithopinion* 10, no date given but 1968, copy in author's possession.

36. Payne and Carpenter, *Ralph Nader Congress Project*, 15; William Barry Furlong, "A Dove Versus A Dogcatcher," *New York Times Magazine*, June 25, 1967, p. 53; Paul Wieck, "How to Survive in the Rockies," *New Republic*, Nov. 2, 1968, p. 15.

Compromise in the best sense, cooperation, and pragmatic politics form the core of Church's legislative legacy. He later wrote that it had always been his policy "to attempt to consider and reconcile the legitimate concerns of the timber industry, environmentalists, and the Forest Service."³⁷ In addition to his efforts on behalf of wilderness, Church honed his coalition-building expertise, particularly in environmental legislation, protecting Idaho's Sawtooths, Hells Canyon, and Salmon River. In 1972 he successfully capped a twelve-year campaign to protect central Idaho's rugged Sawtooth and White Cloud mountains as a national recreation area. While he had initially hoped to create a national park out of the scenic region, Church acknowledged that his state's resource industries were opposed to such a restrictive designation. Hence, in 1966 he introduced two bills in the Senate: one creating a Sawtooth Wilderness National Park, and the other, co-sponsored with his Idaho Republican colleague Len Jordan, setting aside a Sawtooth National Recreation Area, which allowed greater latitude for hunting, mining, timber harvest, and grazing. Public hearings overwhelmingly favored the latter as "the lesser of two evils"—the Idaho Cattlemen's Association, for example, testified it would "heartily recommend a National Recreation Area" because it promoted "multiple use, appropriate development and use of the Area's natural resources in an economical [*sic*] efficient way with least adverse impact on the established local livestock and timber based industries."³⁸ Environmental advocates challenged Church to continue to push for a park, but the pragmatic Senator replied, "if we begin with the Recreation Area, we might eventually have a park—but if we go back to the park proposal now we might never have even the Recreation Area." In the end, Church met most environmentalist demands as

37. Frank Church to Paul Clegg, May 9, 1973, p. 1, in 56/1.1/136/2, Church Papers. Frank Church's coalition-building skills were also evident in his foreign policy work, like his Cooper-Church and Case-Church amendments regarding the Vietnam conflict and his efforts on behalf of the Panama Canal treaty. See Ashby and Gramer, *Fighting the Odds*.

38. On his efforts to protect the Sawtooths, see Sara E. Dant Ewert, "Peak Park Politics: The Struggle over the Sawtooths, from Borah to Church," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, 91 (2000), 138–149; "Sawtooth Recreation Area is Favored," *Twin Falls [Idaho] Times-News*, June 14, 1966; Jenkin Palmer, "Statement of Jenkin Palmer, Malad, Idaho, Vice President, Idaho Cattlemen's Association before the Parks and Recreation Subcommittee, Senate Interior and Insular Affairs Committee," June 13, 1966, folder HR 4821, box 14, MG-93, Compton White, Jr., Papers, University of Idaho Special Collections, Moscow, Idaho. "MG" is the designation for the manuscript collection.

well, for the new Sawtooth National Recreation Area set aside more than 216,000 acres of wilderness and included a total mineral withdrawal, which effectively blocked a proposed molybdenum mine in the White Clouds. Indeed, Church's coalition of National Recreation Area supporters included ranchers, local citizens and private landholders, the Idaho Outdoor Association, the Sierra Club, the Idaho State Legislature, the Idaho Environmental Council, and even the timber industry. The National Recreation Area, Church argued, "meets with the widest acceptance on the part of Idahoans." Although it was not a park, he conceded to one constituent, it was "the most I could get at this time . . . getting action in Congress depends upon lining up the votes. I work in a political forum, where success usually depends on some measure of accommodation. I try to be effective without compromising end objectives."³⁹

While his Sawtooths success helped solidify his environmental commitment, no other issue moved Church to become a wildlands protector more than the fight over a proposed dam in Hells Canyon. When he entered the Senate in 1957, Church heartily supported the High Hells Canyon Dam proposal, a federal behemoth that supporters envisioned spanning the mighty Snake River and powering the postwar Pacific Northwest. His initial objective had been simply to block the private Idaho Power Company from damming the same stretch of river and to promote federal development instead. Idaho Power prevailed. Their three-dam suite, however, eradicated the Snake's salmon and steelhead runs above Hells Canyon, causing Church, and others, to question the true costs of cheap hydropower. When subsequent dam proposals, both federal and private, menaced Church's beloved "River of No Return"—the Salmon—which sustained 30 percent of the total anadromous fish spawn in the Columbia Basin and more than half of all its spring and summer chinook, the Senator took action.⁴⁰ Arguing that "we

39. Frank Church to Dave Hand, May 6, 1969, 56/2.3/1/11, Church Papers; Frank Church, "Statement of Senator Frank Church on Sawtooth National Recreation Area Legislation," Senate Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, April 12, 1972, 56/1.1/93/12, in *ibid.* For support of his efforts, see, for example, Pete Henault to Frank Church, Aug. 31, 1970, 56/4.1/6/9, in *ibid.*; and *Congressional Record—Senate*, March 30, 1971, p. 8515, and *ibid.*, May 27, 1969, pp. 13911–13913; Frank Church to Mrs. Frederick R. Ward, June 28, 1971, in 56/1.1/93/11, Church Papers.

40. On how the Hells Canyon controversy transformed Frank Church, see Ewert, "Evolution of an Environmentalist," 36–51; see also Hutchison to author, Oct. 5, 2006, copy in author's possession. Frank Church to "Gentlemen," May 1, 1959, p. 1,

have sufficient damsites available on our other major rivers to provide all of the water storage, the power, the flood control, and the navigational benefits that the growing needs of the Northwest may require," Church introduced legislation that eventually became the national Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968, which protected, among others, the Salmon River from dam development.⁴¹

Church's shifting priorities derived from his deepening appreciation for the role of dams in the larger environmental picture. To this end, in 1968 he co-sponsored, again with Jordan, his Republican colleague, a ten-year moratorium on dam building on the Middle Snake River. By this time, Church hoped the proposal would buy time for canyon preservationists to build a case to ban dams in Hells Canyon altogether. Jordan believed just the opposite, that the moratorium would give dam advocates time to marshal their forces. The compromise was classic Church. As he later observed, "he understood my position. I understood his. It happened to serve both our purposes at the time to vote for a moratorium." The strategy worked. By 1973 Church had marshaled Idaho's and Oregon's Senate delegations (all Republicans) behind his "Four Senators Bill" to designate a Hells Canyon National Recreation Area, which banned dams on the Middle Snake, protected 192,000 acres of wilderness, and contained input from the Sierra Club, the Wilderness Society, and the Hells Canyon Preservation Council, among others. When it became law in 1975, the director of the Sierra Club hailed the victory as "one of the greatest in the history of American environmentalism."⁴²

This ability to forge consensus out of conflict was also evident in Church's campaign for eastern wilderness. Support for the idea had grown slowly after the passage of the 1964 Wilderness Act. In 1966 a coalition of Wilderness Society members and others had formed with the goal of protecting areas in the Monongahela National Forest of West Virginia, partly in response to large clearcuts that had become common practice there. Four years later the Na-

in 124/2/28, in Fred Hutchison Papers, Boise State University, Boise, Idaho (hereafter Hutchison Papers). Like the Church Papers, the Hutchison Papers are archived by manuscript number, box number, and folder number.

41. *Congressional Record*, Jan. 19, 1960, in 124/2/28, Hutchison Papers; *Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968* (Public Law 90-542), *U.S. Statutes at Large* 82 (1968), 906.

42. Frank Church, interview by Gramer, Jan. 10, 1979, MSS 173, Gramer Collection; Brock Evans, "Success at Hells Canyon," *Sierra Club Bulletin*, 61 (April 1976), 6.

tional Park Service proposed a 75,000-acre wilderness in Virginia's Shenandoah National Park, and in 1972 President Richard Nixon hoped to bolster his environmental image by bemoaning the lack of wilderness in the populous, and delegate-laden, East. Thus, in January 1973 Church helped introduce the Eastern Wilderness Areas Act with a blistering attack on the Forest Service. The *New York Times* had already accused the agency of being more responsive to "the timber industry's economic objective than to a disinterested concern for the land." Church blasted the Forest Service for failing to designate any areas in the eastern United States for inclusion in the wilderness system. Indeed, he argued, the Forest Service had invoked a standard of "purity" in its interpretation of the Wilderness Act that, by its own admission, left little room for the inclusion of any areas east of the Great Plains, even though the greatest demand for wilderness recreation was in the East, close to most of the nation's population. The Forest Service feared that including eastern areas, some of which had been mined or logged or farmed, would open the floodgates of wilderness designation on all national forest lands.⁴³

Church argued that the Forest Service was willfully misinterpreting the Wilderness Act, which he believed fully allowed the designation of lands "once abused by various disturbances decades ago." This in fact was "one of the great promises" of the measure, which the Forest Service, in its "arrogance of power," was thwarting. The Eastern Wilderness Areas bill, which Church cosponsored with Democrat Henry Jackson of Washington and James Buckley (a member of New York State's Conservative Party), proposed nineteen new areas of "instant" wilderness, all contained within the national forests, and the study of thirty-nine additional areas.⁴⁴ Hearings on the measure pitted the Forest Service against Church and other members of the Senate Interior Committee who had allied with the preservation lobby and, in particular, the Wilderness Society. In December the Interior Committee reported the bill, and then, by prior arrangement, referred the measure to the Agri-

43. Dennis M. Roth, *The Wilderness Movement and the National Forests* (College Station, Tex., 1995), 54–55; Allin, *The Politics of Wilderness Preservation*, 187–188; "The Wild East," *New York Times*, Jan. 22, 1973; *Congressional Record—Senate*, Jan. 16, 1973, p. 1251, in 56/7.9/13/5, Church Papers.

44. *Congressional Record—Senate*, Jan. 23, 1973, p. 1997, in 56/7.9/13/5, Church Papers.

culture Committee. Preservationists feared the latter would water down their strongly preservationist bill, but Church and interested members of both committees developed a compromise package that they presented to the Senate. The new bill was an amalgam of several bills and administrative proposals; it retained the nineteen instant wilderness areas and designated forty study areas. In late May 1974 the Senate endorsed this measure and forwarded it to the House. In December, however, the House passed a more limited provision that designated sixteen areas of instant wilderness—nearly 200,000 acres in thirteen states—and only seventeen study areas. Given the lateness of the session, the Senate agreed to the House version, thus avoiding cumbersome conference committee negotiations, and President Gerald Ford signed the measure into law on January 3, 1975.⁴⁵

Church's second major wilderness victory and his growing environmental influence began to garner serious national attention. He firmly believed that the initiative for environmental control legislation had to come from Congress, not the White House, which he charged was "more susceptible to the pressures of industry." Here Church's legislative leadership was decisive. As a detailed survey by consumer advocate Ralph Nader, called simply the Congress Project, noted: "Today, many see Church's [reelection] victory in 1962 as the beginning of the current environmental movement." Senator Gaylord Nelson, Wisconsin Democrat and founder of the national Earth Day movement, supported this conjecture, listing Church as one of five—and only five—Senators he identified as "broad-based, broad-gauged environmentalists."⁴⁶ Former Secretary of Interior Stewart Udall recalled later that Church had really gone "out on a limb" to advocate environmental measures, since Idaho was known to be "in the grip of the user interests." But Church's "bold leadership" garnered Udall's respect, and he believed Church was "one of the preeminent leaders" of the environmental movement in Congress. A lobbyist with a national conservation association concurred: "We've worked with Church a lot, and we note him as first class on environmental issues." Another added

45. *The Eastern Wilderness Areas Act of 1975* (Public Law 93-622), *U.S. Statutes at Large* 88, Part 2 (1976), 2097; Allin, *The Politics of Wilderness Preservation*, 191–192.

46. "Congress Project Member of Congress Questionnaire," 17; Payne and Carpenter, *Ralph Nader Congress Project*, 7; Gaylord Nelson, interview by LeRoy Ashby, May 21, 1987, copy in author's possession.

that, “as far as environment goes, Church is the best we have. He is more politically practical [than conservationists]—more of a political animal because he has to live with the realities of Idaho politics.” The Congress Project also noted that “notoriously independent” Idaho voters respected Church’s “maverick appeal” and appreciated the prestige and national attention that he brought to the state. Church conceded that he had long ago given up trying to change public opinion and had decided instead to “simply vote my convictions.”⁴⁷ By 1974 those “convictions” bore the distinct mark of an environmentalist and wilderness advocate.

Ultimately, Church’s continued displeasure with the Forest Service’s wilderness allocation process prompted his most important contribution to the wilderness debate. In its original language, the 1964 Wilderness Act had directed the Forest Service to review within ten years all “primitive” areas within the national forests and to assess their “suitability or unsuitability for preservation as wilderness.” By the late 1960s, however, the agency appeared to be dragging its feet, and its rigid application of the “purity” standard chafed against a growing national sentiment for broader wilderness preservation. In 1971 criticism of the Forest Service’s stingy interpretation of the Wilderness Act led to the first of two Roadless Area Review and Evaluations (RARE). Remarkably, in only ten months, the Forest Service claimed it had inventoried and studied nearly 56 million acres in 1,449 areas, many of which were snowbound during the field evaluation stages of the process. The agency held 300 public meetings and received more than 50,000 written and oral comments—the federal government’s most extensive public involvement effort to date.⁴⁸ In October 1973, in its final recommendation, the Forest Service proposed 274 separate wilderness areas containing just 12.3 million acres (of which 4.4 million either Congress or the Service had previously committed to study). Angry environmental organizations like the Sierra Club filed suit in federal court, demanding that the agency protect the entire 56 million acres until it had conducted a more thorough review.⁴⁹ Under this pressure, RARE collapsed, paving the way for Church

47. Stewart Udall interview; Payne and Carpenter, *Ralph Nader Congress Project*, 6, 15.

48. *The Wilderness Act of 1964*, 891; Roth, *The Wilderness Movement*, 53.

49. Allin, *The Politics of Wilderness Preservation*, 161; Roth, *The Wilderness Movement*, 54.

and Congress to pass the Eastern Wilderness Areas Act of 1974 and the subsequent Endangered American Wilderness Act of 1978.

While the Eastern Wilderness Areas Act addressed the need to designate wilderness areas located near East Coast population centers, Church's Endangered American Wilderness Act sought protection for western sites excluded from RARE by the Forest Service's so-called "sights and sounds" doctrine—a "purity" standard invoked for areas that were too close to major urban centers, such as Albuquerque, Salt Lake City, and Tucson.⁵⁰ Since RARE had classified these roadless areas as multiple-use lands unsuitable for wilderness, Church and many environmental organizations deemed them "endangered" by logging, mining, and mechanized recreation. As Church argued, "it was *not* the intent of Congress that wilderness be administered in so pure a fashion as to needlessly restrict their customary public use and enjoyment."⁵¹ To overcome the Forest Service obstacle, Church introduced the Endangered American Wilderness Act in June of 1976 to preserve "remnants of the wilderness upon which we founded our society and culture." Arizona Representative Morris Udall introduced a companion measure in the House. The bill designated nine new "instant" wilderness areas covering more than 1 million acres in seven western states, and six other study areas comprising over 477,000 acres in three western states.⁵²

Church congratulated Congress for "proceeding well" in carrying out the mandate of the 1964 Wilderness Act, but he again faulted the Forest Service for its failure to recommend protection

50. Roth, *The Wilderness Movement*, 63.

51. Church, "Whither Wilderness?" 40–41. Indeed, Hutchison, Church's legislative assistant from 1975 to 1981, argued that Church's vision of wilderness was "never a strictly pure, we've got to take this back to its natural state, close all roads, throw out all private inholdings and eliminate all the landing strips. I think he was much more pragmatic than that." Hutchison interview.

52. *Congressional Record—Senate*, 94 Cong., 2 sess. (June 29, 1976), 1–2, in 56/7.9/13/5, Church Papers. In the 1976 bill, the nine new "instant" wilderness areas were: the 200,000-acre Wenaha-Tucannon in Washington and Oregon; the 42,000-acre French Pete in Oregon; the 240,000-acre Golden Trout, the 60,080-acre addition to the Ventana Wilderness, and the 21,250-acre Santa Lucia in California; the 56,510-acre Pusch Ridge in Arizona; the 405,000-acre West Chichagof-Yakobi in Alaska; the 33,500-acre Lone Peak in Utah; and the 30,700-acre Sandia Mountains in New Mexico. The six wilderness study areas were: the 89,000-acre McGregor-Thompson and the 22,000-acre Mount Henry in Montana; the 146,240-acre Holy Cross and the 77,000-acre Hunter-Fryingpan in Colorado; and the 62,930-acre Rincon Mountain and the 80,430-acre Galiuro Wilderness additions in Arizona.

for numerous undeveloped roadless areas he called “de facto wilderness.” Church strongly criticized RARE, insisting that the fate of “these last wild lands” should not be based on “hasty decisions.” He particularly criticized agency practices that often subdivided a single large tract of potential wilderness land into a number of separate roadless areas or indiscriminately lumped several distinct roadless areas into one large tract. This “flawed and inadequate” process, he complained, left the public with “an artificially extreme choice: do we save all of the roadless land for wilderness, or none of it?” The answer to that question, Church believed, was best addressed by Congress, the “final arbiter” in issues involving the size and extent of additions to the wilderness system.⁵³

The bill failed to make notable progress that year, and Church reintroduced it in March 1977. The result of extensive consultations with other western senators, the proposal now encompassed 1.7 million acres and included eleven “instant” wilderness areas and eight additional wilderness study areas.⁵⁴ Environmental organizations such as the Sierra Club assembled their considerable forces to urge Congress to pass the Endangered Wilderness bill. As executive director Michael McCloskey explained, the purpose of the bill was “to get a number of high quality, seriously threatened national forest ‘de facto’ wilderness areas in the system,” while educating Congress “to the underlying problems of land use planning on the national forests.” Furthermore, McCloskey believed that successful passage of the bill would remind “every Senator and Congressman of the broad support we can marshal for wilderness issues.” For the most part, however, the Sierra Club had been careful to select areas that were not too controversial. Doug Scott, who managed the organization’s Endangered Wilderness campaign, later conceded that

53. *Ibid.*, 2.

54. Frank Church, “News Release,” March 30, 1977, p. 1, in 56/7.9/13/5, Church Papers. In the 1977 bill, the eleven new “instant” wilderness areas were: the Golden Trout, Santa Lucia, and Ventana Wilderness additions in California; the 69,400-acre Goose Creek in Colorado; the 37,000-acre Manzano Mountain and the Sandia Mountain in New Mexico; the 24,500-acre Middle Santiam, the 29,000-acre Wild Rogue, the 134,000-acre Kalmiopsis, and the French Pete in Oregon; and a reduced 129,000-acre Wenaha-Tucannon in Washington and Oregon. The eight wilderness study areas were: the 136,000-acre Kalmiopsis in Oregon; the Chichagof-Yakobi in Alaska; the Galiuro in Arizona; the 82,700-acre La Garita in Colorado; the 50,900-acre Chama River Canyon in New Mexico; and the 28,915-acre Welcome Creek, the Mount Henry, and the McGregor-Thompson in Montana.

“each area was ready to go but didn’t look it—that was the stroke of genius about it.” Scott also acknowledged the vital role that Church played in transforming the Sierra Club’s “wish list” into concrete legislation. In his testimony before the Senate Subcommittee on Parks and Recreation, Scott quoted Church extensively, reminding the committee of the senator’s long history of wilderness advocacy and commending him “for the outstanding leadership he has provided through the development of this constructive legislation.”⁵⁵

Despite predictable opposition from various resource interests, the Endangered American Wilderness bill enjoyed widespread congressional support, and both the Senate and the House passed the measure by overwhelming majorities in February 1978.⁵⁶ In its final form, the act designated seventeen wilderness areas in nine western states, incorporating 1.3 million acres into the national wilderness system. Congress also used the act to admonish the Forest Service publicly, charging that undeveloped national forest lands were “not being adequately protected or fully studied for wilderness suitability by the agency responsible for their administration.” In the face of such negligence, the law reads, Congress “finds and declares that it is in the national interest” to protect these “endangered areas” as wilderness. In language reminiscent of the 1964 Wilderness Act, the 1978 Endangered American Wilderness Act promised to preserve these areas for their “specific multiple values for watershed preservation, wildlife habitat protection, scenic and historic preservation[,] . . . solitude, physical and mental challenge, and inspiration for the benefit of all of the American people of present and future generations.”⁵⁷

55. Roth, *The Wilderness Movement*, 63; Douglas Scott, “Statement of Douglas Scott, Coordinator, Citizens for America’s Endangered Wilderness, on S. 1180 and H.R. 3454, The ‘Endangered American Wilderness Act of 1977,’” Sept. 19, 1977, p. 2, in 56/1.1/154/12, Church Papers.

56. In the 1977 House Interior Committee hearings, singer John Denver strummed his guitar and sang his testimony. The words later formed the basis for his song “To the Wild Country,” which he released in the fall of 1977. *Congressional Record—Senate*, March 20, 1978, p. S4130, in 56/7.9/13/6, Church Papers.

57. *The Endangered American Wilderness Act of 1978* (Public Law 95-237), *U.S. Statutes at Large*, Vol. 92, Part 1 (1980), p. 92, Stat. 40. The seventeen new wilderness areas were: the 56,430-acre Pusch Ridge Wilderness in Arizona; the 306,000-acre Golden Trout Wilderness, the 21,250-acre Santa Lucia Wilderness, and the 61,000-acre Ventana Wilderness in California; the 74,450-acre Hunter-Fryingpan Wilderness in Colorado; the 37,000-acre Manzano Mountain Wilderness, the 30,930-acre Sandia Mountain Wilderness, and the 50,300-acre Chama River Canyon Wilderness in New Mexico;

Church was particularly proud to have played such a pivotal role in passing this third major wilderness act, in part because it represented such a significant achievement for Idaho. One of the seventeen new wilderness areas in the Endangered American Wilderness Act was the 206,000-acre Gospel-Hump Wilderness in north-central Idaho—a rugged terrain stretching from Gospel Peak on the west to Buffalo Hump Mountain on the east. Although it was a last-minute amendment, the Gospel-Hump proposal represented thousands of hours of cooperation between Idaho environmentalists, industry officials, and local citizens whom Church had brought together. Like the other areas in the Endangered American Wilderness Act, the Gospel-Hump region had been a victim of RARE. During the evaluation, the Forest Service had arbitrarily subdivided the 450,000-acre Gospel-Hump area into eight separate “planning units,” and this piecemeal approach drew a rash of criticism. Idaho conservationists, including the Idaho Environmental Council and the local chapter of the Sierra Club, filed administrative appeals on the land-management plans, which raised legitimate concerns but also delayed decisions on timber sales vital to the local wood-products industry. In March 1977 Forest Service Chief John McGuire ruled that the piecemeal planning process could not effectively evaluate the wilderness potential of the area and mandated a new, collective evaluation for all of the adjacent roadless units within the Gospel-Hump area. The problem, Church predicted, was that “the new plan, like the old, will be immune neither to appeal, nor to prolonged litigation in the courts.” Admitting that he knew “full well that the safest political course was to sympathize and then do nothing,” Church instead brokered a compromise.⁵⁸

Seeking to cut through the red tape that threatened to strangle the region economically, Church invited “all interested groups and agencies to sit down and work out a plan” in April. He

the 29,567-acre Lone Peak Wilderness in Utah; the 14,940-acre Savage Run Wilderness in Wyoming; the 28,440-acre Welcome Creek Wilderness in Montana; the 92,000-acre Kalmiopsis Wilderness, the 36,700-acre Wild Rogue Wilderness, the 180,000-acre Wenaha-Tucannon Wilderness, the 33,000-acre Mount Hood Wilderness, and the 45,400-acre Three Sisters Wilderness in Oregon; and the 206,000-acre Gospel-Hump Wilderness in Idaho.

58. *Congressional Record—Senate*, Oct. 20, 1977, p. S17385, in 56/7.9/13/5, Church Papers; Frank Church, “Opening Statement by Senator Frank Church, Hearing Before the Parks and Recreation Subcommittee of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, Grangeville, Idaho,” Aug. 24, 1977, p. 4, in *ibid.*

envisioned a basic proposal that would classify a core area of the Gospel-Hump as wilderness with a wilderness-study buffer area and the remainder classified for multiple-use management. If the disparate parties could reach a consensus, Church promised to turn their agreement into legislation. The initial meeting was held in Grangeville, Idaho, in the heart of depressed timber country, and the mood was decidedly tense. As environmental activist Dennis Baird later recalled, the hearing minutes did not reflect that “half of the sheriff’s department” was in attendance: “There were armed wacko, Militia-types outside the building, and other locals with a gallows for Frank Church on the back of a pick-up truck.”⁵⁹ But Church made it work. Doug Scott of the Sierra Club noted that “the very act of getting us to sit down was pivotal,” and he later marveled that, “if anybody had said to me the Sierra Club would be sitting down at the Elks Club in Grangeville week after week with the Chamber of Commerce, I would have said that’s ludicrous.”⁶⁰ Church believed that their mutual interest in the land and its resources would draw both the wood-products industry and environmentalists to the bargaining table and, with his help, lead to a workable solution to this long-standing problem. Scott noted that Church worked “hard throughout the negotiation process to stay close to all of the negotiators and keep the process moving constructively.” Final wrangling stretched into the wee hours of July 13, but what emerged from these meetings was a solid proposal to protect approximately 220,000 acres of the Gospel-Hump area as wilderness—which consisted mostly of the high alpine country—while releasing 123,000 acres for timber harvest and development. As Scott later wrote, “he had led us to a win-win.”⁶¹

In his testimony before the Senate, Church thanked the di-

59. Frank Church, “News Release,” April 6, 1977, 56/7.9/13/5, Church Papers; Charles Pezeshki, *Wild to the Last: Environmental Conflict in the Clearwater Country* (Pullman, Wash., 1998), 134.

60. Doug Scott to author, Feb. 18, 2007; clipping from *Lewiston [Idaho] Tribune*, n.d., in 56/12/3/19, Church Papers. Those participating in the agreement were: Herb Blewett, Jack Olson, Jack Marek, Terry Vanderwall, and Oren Robinson, all members of the Grangeville Chamber Task Force; Scott, Northwest Representative of the Sierra Club; Dennis Baird, President of the Northern Rockies Chapter of the Sierra Club; Dan Lechefsky, Idaho Representative of the Wilderness Society; and Morton Brigham, director of the Idaho Environmental Council. Frank Church, “News Release,” July 13, 1977, in 56/1.1/157/2, Church Papers.

61. Scott to author, Feb. 18, 2007; *Congressional Record—Senate*, Oct. 20, 1977, p. S17386.

verse coalition that had come together to break the deadlock over the Gospel-Hump region. He stated his hope that the example would become “a pilot project . . . to resolve volatile issues on the future management of roadless areas.” Reaffirming his own political pragmatism, he noted that this compromise plan “proved that it is possible, even where there is heated controversy, to put together a reasonable plan which accommodates the differing interests of our citizenry, all of whom own our national forests.” More tinkering, as a result of these hearings, whittled the proposed wilderness down to 206,000 acres. Church also agreed to accept an amendment by fellow Idaho senator, Republican James McClure, allowing snowmobile travel in the area, knowing the concession would never survive the House-Senate conference committee.⁶² Idaho governor John Evans praised the cooperative effort that had led to “a workable and realistic solution,” while Idaho Representative Steve Symms, a Republican, charged that the wilderness proposal would result in “instant poverty.” In spite of Symms, the *Lewiston Tribune* editorialized that, although they might differ over how much to preserve or develop, “make no mistake about it: rather large numbers of Idahoans, to greater and lesser degrees, want something left standing of Idaho as they knew it as children.” There was no mistaking the Senate’s sentiment either; it passed the Endangered American Wilderness bill, including the Gospel-Hump amendment, by a vote of eighty-nine to three.⁶³

As Church predicted, Senate conferees quickly excised McClure’s offending snowmobile provision, and the House conferees accepted the Senate language. The House also voted against a proposal by Symms to remove completely the wilderness designation for the Gospel-Hump area and instead to designate the 206,000 acres for wilderness study. When the Endangered American Wilderness Act became law in February 1978, all 206,000 acres of the Gospel-Hump region became wilderness. The law also designated about 92,000 contiguous acres for multiple-use management by

62. Frank Church, “News Release,” Oct. 20, 1977, in 56/7.9/13/5, Church Papers; Church, “Opening Statement,” Aug. 24, 1977, p. 6; Frank Church to Ernest Day, Dec. 8, 1977, 56/1.1/153/12, in *ibid.*

63. “Evans Supports Compromise in Gospel-Hump Testimony,” [*Boise*] *Idahoan*, Aug. 24, 1977; Gary S. Sharpe, “Seventy-five Testify at Hearing,” *Lewiston [Idaho] Tribune*, Aug. 25, 1977; “Inside Preservationists,” in *ibid.*, Sept. 11, 1977; Frank Church, “News Release,” Oct. 20, 1977.

the Forest Service and made another 45,000 acres available immediately for timber sales.⁶⁴

Building upon this momentum, Church next focused his attention on the long-sought goal to establish a River of No Return Wilderness in Idaho, the heart of which comprised the Idaho and Salmon River Breaks Primitive Areas. The results attested to and were a keen test of his coalition-building skills. The Forest Service had set aside the two tracts, separated only by the Salmon River, in the 1930s. Together they encompassed more than 1.4 million acres. By 1974 formal proposals for a wilderness area classification began to surface and predictably drew the ire of Idaho's resource interests. At three Forest Service hearings in Idaho, logging and mining interests, livestock associations, power and irrigation interests, and motor-sports advocates voiced opposition to more wilderness in Idaho. Lumber giant Boise Cascade lobbied hard for the release of 870,000 acres from the primitive area designation, while the Idaho state legislature passed joint memorials opposing wilderness. Yet the proposal enjoyed solid support from the state's sportsmen's clubs, environmental organizations, and Idaho's conservation-minded governor and Church ally Cecil Andrus.⁶⁵

Sensitive to these competing interests, Church introduced three separate bills in early 1979 to reclassify the Idaho and Salmon River Breaks Primitive Areas. The first, drafted by the River of No Return Wilderness Council and called the "citizens bill" by its backers, designated 2.3 million acres for wilderness protection and added 237 miles of the Salmon River to the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. The second bill, proposed by the Idaho Forest Industry Council, outlined a 1.3-million-acre "Central Idaho Wilderness," designated approximately 840,000 acres for multiple-use management, and made no recommendation for protecting the Salmon River. The third bill was a 2.1 million-acre administration proposal, which also included protection for the Salmon River.

64. Frank Church, "News Release," Nov. 2, 1977, in 56/7.9/13/4, Church Papers. The vote of the Senate conferees to delete the snowmobile provision was five to two, with Church joining Idaho Senator James McClure. In an unusual departure, the act created a seven-member Gospel-Hump Advisory Committee, responsible to the Secretary of Agriculture, to assist in the creation and evaluation of a multipurpose resource development plan for the non-wilderness areas identified in the act. *The Endangered American Wilderenss Act of 1978*, in *U.S. Statutes at Large* 92 (1980), p. 92, Stat. 43–46.

65. *Congressional Record—Senate*, Oct. 1, 1974, p. S17850, in 56/7.9/13/5, Church Papers.

Church's trio of proposals shrewdly insured that the Idaho wilderness debate would focus not on *whether* but on *how much* to preserve. Following extensive public hearings throughout Idaho in April and May during which nearly 600 individuals testified, Church was prepared by September to advance the "citizens bill." The *Idaho Statesman*, which had traditionally opposed wilderness, called the measure "an excellent piece of legislation" that "both the logger and the backpacker" could support; "the day for the River of No Return Wilderness has come."⁶⁶

In the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee (formerly the Interior Committee), Church hoped to forge a viable consensus—by now a hallmark of his policymaking—and willingly accepted amendments to the Wilderness Council proposal. Fred Hutchison, Church's legislative assistant, later recalled that Church "recognized that there would be times when there would have to be trade-offs," and even the conservative *Idaho County Free Press* conceded that Church's bill "seems to offer something for everybody, and not just for environmentalists." The committee unanimously recommended legislation—now called the "Central Idaho Wilderness Act of 1980"—designating 2.2 million acres of wilderness in the Salmon River country and an additional 105,000 acres of wilderness in the long-contested Magruder Corridor of the existing Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness, and adding 125 miles of the Salmon River to the Wild and Scenic Rivers System. As the *Lewiston Tribune* humorously editorialized, the proposal was "not a wildernut's dream," nor did it "whet the appetite of the timber beast," but in the end it was "about as good as could be expected—probably even better." Church believed the measure also advanced Idaho's goal of resolving, once and for all, the controversy over the region's land management, which had existed in limbo for years.⁶⁷

Once the Central Idaho Wilderness bill moved to the Senate

66. On February 6, 1978, Church introduced the citizen-proposed bill and insured that its fundamental principles survived in the Energy and Natural Resources Committee. *Congressional Record—Senate*, Feb. 6, 1978, p. S1210, in 56/7.9/13/6, Church Papers; *ibid.*, Nov. 20, 1979, pp. S17079, S17084. At the hearing in Salmon, Idaho, one cowboy protester, wishing to show his disdain for the wilderness proposal, rode his horse into the hearing room, down the center aisle, and then out the side door. The editor of a local paper turned to Church's wife Bethine and asked, "well, what did you think of that?" To which Bethine replied, "I thought that was a very handsome horse." Frank Church to Margaret Fuller, Oct. 5, 1983, in 56/10.7/2/18, Church Papers.

67. *Congressional Record—Senate*, Nov. 20, 1979, pp. S17080, S17083, S17084; Hutchison interview.

floor, however, Church discovered that its most formidable foe was none other than his own colleague from Idaho, James McClure. The *Lewiston Tribune* editorialized that, should the wilderness bill succeed, “as it should—the credit will go to Sen. Frank Church,” but if the bill failed, “the blame goes to Sen. James McClure.” Even though Church and McClure had cooperated on important aspects of the legislation, McClure bore a strong allegiance to resource interests in Idaho, particularly the mining and timber industries. He confessed to having “reluctantly agreed” with Church that the River of No Return Wilderness proposal was “the best we can do under the current political climate.” Nevertheless, McClure feared that too much wilderness threatened to shut down the state’s lumber mills and jeopardize national security by locking up minerals, cobalt in particular, which he deemed “absolutely essential” to the machine tool and jet aircraft industries. Church’s wilderness bill, he believed, contributed not only to the country’s economic malaise but also to the decline in American military preparedness: “The people of the United States are becoming aware that we are not the best prepared military power on the face of the Earth, that we are today No. 2.” After characterizing Church’s Gospel-Hump consensus as “take this compromise good or bad, but take it or die,” McClure proposed an amendment directing the Forest Service to release all RARE II lands in Idaho not designated as wilderness “for uses other than wilderness,” and to insure that “no such lands shall again be considered for designation as wilderness.”⁶⁸

Church voiced strong opposition to the proposed amendment, calling it “unnecessary” and “mischievous” and charging that its true purpose was to jeopardize the bill in the House. The intent of the amendment, he argued, could be accomplished by appropriate release language in the committee report, and both the Departments of Interior and Agriculture concurred. Surprisingly, even the lumber companies most vulnerable to cutbacks in timber availability opposed the McClure amendment, stating that they would rather address the “question of statutory release language for Idaho RARE II areas in a future Congress when the nation’s entire 64 million acres are opened up under Congressional scrutiny.” On November 20, in a roll-call vote, the Senate first rejected McClure’s amendment twenty-one to sixty-seven and then passed the Central Idaho

68. “Not the Best Bill, But Good Enough,” *Lewiston [Idaho] Morning Tribune*, Nov. 11, 1979; *Congressional Record—Senate*, Nov. 20, 1979, pp. S17082, 17085, 17092.

Wilderness bill by a vote of sixty-nine to eighteen.⁶⁹ On June 1, 1980, the House approved the bill 271 to 137, and on July 23, 1980, President Jimmy Carter signed the Central Idaho Wilderness Act of 1980. The law created a 2,239,000-acre River of No Return Wilderness—the largest in the continental United States at the time—which subsumed the old Idaho and Salmon River Breaks Primitive Areas and set aside a 125-mile stretch of the Salmon River for inclusion in the Wild and Scenic Rivers system. As Church reportedly commented at the signing ceremony, “it’s a good day for Idaho when Idahoans get together to work out their differences.”⁷⁰

Church had successfully protected the very heart of his state as wilderness and wild river, yet his bill powerfully illustrated the evolving nature of the wilderness ideal and the practical political compromises essential to making wilderness work. Language in the act created a “special mining management zone” for the Clear Creek area of the wilderness, for example, where prospecting and exploration for cobalt were the “dominant use,” despite provisions to the contrary in the original 1964 Wilderness Act. Mine patentees retained the right to cut and use mature timber as well as the right to use as much of the surface area “as reasonably necessary” to extract minerals. The Sierra Club’s Doug Scott later recalled that Church “concluded he had to do this and we let it slide (though the whole idea would have started World War III with the

69. McClure voted against the measure. *Congressional Record—Senate*, Nov. 20, 1979, pp. S17088–S17090, S17101; Frank Church to “Dear Friend,” Dec. 1979, in 56/101/154/14, Church Papers. The term used to describe McClure’s amendment proposing the release of RARE II lands was “hard release” language.

70. In 1994 the California Desert Protection Act changed the status of Death Valley National Monument to Death Valley National Park and added 1.3 million acres of Bureau of Land Management land to the park, bringing its total acreage to approximately 3.3 million acres. Congress designated most of the land—3,253,000 acres—as the Death Valley Wilderness Area, making it by far the largest wilderness in the continental United States, relegating Idaho’s River of No Return Wilderness to second. The Central Idaho Wilderness Act classified the forty-six-mile segment from the mouth of the North Fork of the Salmon River to Corn Creek as a “recreational river,” and the seventy-nine-mile segment from Corn Creek to Long Tom Bar as a “wild river.” The measure also incorporated 105,600 acres of the Magruder Corridor into the existing Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness, leaving only a 600-foot easement encasing the Magruder Road from Elk City, Idaho, to Darby, Montana, as a narrow strip of non-wilderness between the two massive protected areas. *The Central Idaho Wilderness Act of 1980* (Public law 96-312), *U.S. Statutes at Large* 94, Part 1 (1981), p. 94, Stat. 948; Fred Hutchison, “Frank Church Would’ve Wanted Idahoans to Work Out Differences,” *[Boise] Idaho Statesman*, July 23, 2005.

environmental movement under any other circumstances).⁷¹ Another section of the law permitted the use of aircraft and existing landing strips within the wilderness, again counter to the original intent of the 1964 act. The Central Idaho Wilderness Act also permitted the use of motor boats, including motorized jetboats, on the Salmon River segments included in the Wild and Scenic Rivers System at levels “not less than the level of use which occurred during calendar year 1978.”⁷² Church later wrote to a friend that the Central Idaho Wilderness Act “was my last major accomplishment for Idaho, and I barely managed to overcome the combined opposition of the other three members of the Idaho delegation before my term expired.” Senator Gaylord Nelson firmly believed that the River of No Return Wilderness was Church’s best effort: “If he hadn’t been there, it wouldn’t have happened.” Church’s press secretary confessed that, “if ever there was a tough political decision, that was it.”⁷³

Unfortunately for Church and environmentalists, the rest of the Idaho delegation—McClure, Symms, and Republican Representative George Hansen—more accurately reflected the state’s—and the nation’s—changing political mood by the late 1970s. Even during the 1974 election, one political scientist had noted the “pronounced shift to the right” in Idaho politics, exemplified by the election of Symms, a “right-wing Republican with strong Birch ties,” and “a similarly inclined” McClure. As the decade wore on, voters continued to reward the “blanket pro-development philosophies” of all three of Church’s colleagues. On the national level, by the end of Church’s fourth term, commodity interests appeared to be gaining lost ground as the nation spiraled into an abysmal recession spurred by the energy crisis and soaring interest rates. A stagnant economy coupled with double-digit inflation—“stagflation”—eroded the national standard of living and caused many Americans to focus on issues closer to home: declining wages, rising unemploy-

71. Scott to author, Feb. 18, 2007. It was never mined, however.

72. *The Central Idaho Wilderness Act of 1980*, p. 94, Stat. 948–94, Stat. 954.

73. Church to Fuller, Oct. 5, 1983; David Morrissey, “Frank Church,” *Twin Falls [Idaho] Times-News*, Sept. 21, 1980; Nelson interview. In 1986 Idaho Republican Representative (later Senator) Larry Craig proposed building a two-lane paved highway into the heart of the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness to make it more accessible to tourists. Carlos Schwantes, *The Pacific Northwest: An Interpretive History* (Lincoln, Nebr., 1996), 496; Cleve Corlett, interview by Rod Gramer, Aug. 7, 1984, MSS 173, Gramer Collection.

ment, soaring housing costs, and staggering interest rates. Public opinion polls revealed that, as Americans paid sky-high prices at the gas pump, they now worried more about the energy crisis than the environment. The result, Forest Service historian Dennis Roth has argued, was that “industry could now hope to convince people that wilderness designation has impeded efforts at attaining low-cost housing and energy independence.”⁷⁴ In 1980 Church lost his bid for a fifth term to none other than Steve Symms.

Mike Wetherell, a former Church staffer, remarked that Church always believed that “he would be remembered the most for his work in the environment.” It was an impressive legacy. In Idaho alone, Church had been instrumental in setting aside 3.87 million acres of wilderness, two national recreation areas, and 574 miles of wild and scenic rivers, while his national legislative record reads like a hall-of-fame listing of environmental policy. In early 1984, just before his untimely death at age fifty-nine, Congress appended Church’s name to the 2.3 million-acre River of No Return Wilderness to commemorate his contributions to wilderness preservation and environmental protection.⁷⁵

Church was not alone in making this odyssey from New Deal conservationist to progressive environmentalist, of course. Indeed, his “class” of 1963–1964, the 88th Congress, was renowned as the “Conservation Congress” and featured such Senate luminaries as Clinton Anderson, Henry “Scoop” Jackson, and Gaylord Nelson, among others, as well as Mo Udall, John Saylor, and Montana Democrat Lee Metcalf in the House. But even among this environmental elite, Frank Church of Idaho emerged as one of the very best. Anderson’s own coalition-building, for example, had been essential in passing the original Wilderness Act, but, as his biographer observes, 1964 marked the end of his “active role in the shaping of natural resources policy.” Jackson, whose Senate career almost perfectly mirrored Church’s, also looms large in environmental legislative history as the powerful chair of the Senate Interior Committee, but Jackson enjoyed a political luxury that Church did not—a home state that included the liberal urban masses thronging to

74. Loch Johnson, “Frank Church and the Birchers,” *The Nation*, Oct. 19, 1974, p. 358; “The Wilderness Bill,” [*Boise*] *Idaho Statesman*, Nov. 11, 1979; Roth, *The Wilderness Movement*, 66.

75. Mike Wetherell to LeRoy Ashby, July 15, 1987, p. 19, copy in author’s possession; Chris Bouneff, “Frank Church,” *Cavalcade 1997*, Feb. 28, 1997, p. 120.

Seattle and committed to preservation. Early field hearings on the wilderness bill, for example, elicited strong support for the measure in both Washington and Mo Udall's Arizona.⁷⁶ Church's Idaho, by contrast, grew ever more conservative during his tenure and continued to depend heavily on its extractive economy. Yet, as Doug Scott, formerly with the Wilderness Society and the Sierra Club, has recalled, "Frank was among the handful of absolutely crucial leaders we turned to again and again." "He did not come across as a crusader for wilderness, but rather as a quieter, careful workman who crafted the deft compromises and accommodations."⁷⁷

Church's wilderness legacy continues to resonate into the twenty-first century as recent wilderness designations have abandoned old "purity" standards and embraced the coalition-building ideal that Church championed. The trouble with wilderness had always been in its definition.⁷⁸ What exactly was wilderness? Where did it begin? Where did it end? Church's signal contribution to the great wilderness debate was to demonstrate that, while Congress would be the final arbiter of wilderness designations, "wilderness" itself was an evolving idea that defied narrow classification.

For example, in January 2006 in Utah, a remarkable alliance of environmentalists and Utah Republican politicians succeeded in protecting the 100,000-acre Cedar Mountain Wilderness Area after more than two decades of political stalemate.⁷⁹ The first new stand-alone wilderness in Utah since 1984 embraces a rugged mountain range that harbors a diversity of wildlife, but its designation was the result of political compromise that harks back to Frank Church. The momentum to set aside the Cedar Mountain area derived from the state's efforts to block a controversial proposal by the local Goshute Indian tribe to ship and store nuclear

76. Baker, *Conservation Politics*, 194; Mark Harvey, *Wilderness Forever: Howard Zahniser and the Path to the Wilderness Act* (Seattle, 2005), 210.

77. See, for example, Eric C. Ewert, "From Hinterland to Bellwether: A Century of Demographic and Economic Change in the Pacific Northwest," *Journal of the West*, 45 (Winter 2006), 41–51. Scott to author, Feb. 3 and Feb. 18, 2007, copies in author's possession.

78. See, for example, William Cronon's "The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," in William Cronon, ed., *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature* (New York, 1995), 69–90.

79. For a thorough discussion of Utah's long wilderness conflict, see Doug Goodman and Dan McCool, eds., *Contested Landscape: The Politics of Wilderness in Utah and the West* (Salt Lake City, 1999).

waste on their reservation. A wilderness designation would, and did, block railway access to the dump site. Moreover, the wilderness set aside preserved the military's access to the Utah Test and Training Range, which provides the largest overland safety footprint available in the Department of Defense and has the largest overland contiguous block of supersonic-authorized restricted airspace in the continental United States. Language in the Cedar Mountain act specifically allows "low-level overflights and operations of military aircraft, helicopters, missiles, or unmanned aerial vehicles over the covered wilderness." While this exemption might have made the original wilderness founders cringe, it reflects the reality of modern wilderness designation. Quite simply, without the exemption, there would be no wilderness. Indeed, the designation language for the Cedar Mountain Wilderness echoes Church's arguments for the Eastern Wilderness Areas Act: "The fact that non-wilderness activities or uses can be seen or heard within the wilderness area shall not, of itself, preclude such activities or uses up to the boundary of the wilderness area."⁸⁰ Even the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance, long stymied in its efforts to set aside roadless areas in the state, heaped praise on this "unanimously agreeable solution," stating that the victory "proves that reasonable people can work together and agree on a good wilderness bill."⁸¹

Similar wilderness efforts are also under way in Church's home state of Idaho. Under the somewhat deceptive title of the "Central Idaho Economic Development and Recreation Act" (CIEDRA), Republican Representative Mike Simpson is attempting to resurrect the cooperative conservation that Church forged and do what no one in the state has been able to accomplish since 1980—set aside wilderness, this time in Idaho's Boulder-White Clouds mountains. Simpson's bill, which the House passed in July 2006, resulted from seven years of the kind of careful coalition building so reminiscent of Church. CIEDRA includes a 300,000-acre wilderness designa-

80. Hill Airforce Base, *Utah Test and Training Range*, available online at <http://www.hill.af.mil/uttr/>, accessed July 20, 2006. *National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2006* (Public Law 109-163), *U.S. Statutes at Large*, p. 119, Stat. 3136.

81. Peter Downing, "Utahns Rally Around a Cedar Mountains Wilderness Bill," *Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance Newsletter*, Autumn 2005, p. 2; "Cedar Mountains Wilderness Victory!" available online at www.suwa.org/page.php?page_id=235, accessed Aug. 14, 2006.

tion, as well as a 520,000-acre special management area surrounding the wilderness, which would allow for continued motor-vehicle access to many popular trails. Other provisions include land transfers to local communities, grants for economic development, and wheelchair-accessible trails *in* the wilderness area.⁸² While no interest group is thrilled with the entire package, ranchers, environmentalists, various city councils, numerous Idaho businesses, Church's widow Bethine, and even former Senator McClure have all given their support to the compromise bill that has emerged. The Idaho Conservation League believes that "Rep. Mike Simpson deserves high praise for reaching out to so many diverse interests, ensuring that all voices and concerns were heard and considered." Simpson's vintage Church-esque position is that "what we must have is give-and-take, a willingness to find a reasonable compromise that addresses all those who care about the Boulder-White Clouds and depend on the area for their livelihoods and enjoyment."⁸³

Since the 1980s western states have consistently failed to pass omnibus wilderness acts, despite intense lobbying and countless campaigns by wilderness advocates. Instead, these efforts have produced a bitter and intense political polarization that has left millions of roadless acres exposed and vulnerable to the ever-increasing hordes of all-terrain vehicles, off-road vehicles, and frustrated ranchers making "roads" with their tractors. As the Idaho Conservation League concedes, "[our] long-term vision for Idaho wilderness is a bold one; over 10 million acres . . . and if we're ever going to protect it, we must relearn how to do it."⁸⁴ As these recent efforts in Utah and Idaho demonstrate, Church's coalition-building, one-wilderness-at-a-time paradigm, which incorporates the best of local collaboration, provides a model that can succeed. The congenial Idaho Senator may never have wielded a monkey wrench, but he was fond of quoting the irascible Edward Abbey line that "wilder-

82. *Central Idaho Economic Development and Recreation Act (H.R. 3603)*, *Congressional Record*, 109 Cong., 2 sess. (2006), p. H5618.

83. Rick Johnson, "Press Release: Idaho a Step Closer to First New Wilderness in 26 Years," July 19, 2006, available online at <http://www.wildidaho.org/media.php?id=50>, accessed July 20, 2006; Mike Simpson, "Seeking a Stronger Central Idaho," available online at http://www.house.gov/simpson/central_idaho.seeking.shtml, accessed July 20, 2006.

84. Idaho Conservation League, "Special Update! Memo," July 28, 2006.

ness needs no defense—only more defenders.”⁸⁵ Frank Church was among the best. During his twenty-four-year tenure in the Senate, Church helped translate the idea of wilderness into tangible reality, and his enduring legacy is a model of citizen cooperation that ensures the politics of wilderness will continue to work.

85. See, for example, Hal Bernton, “Took the Lead on Wilderness,” *Twin Falls [Idaho] Times-News*, April 12, 1984.