

**Review: Wilderness Forever: Howard Zahniser and the Path to the
Wilderness Act**
By Mark Harvey

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Mark Harvey. *Wilderness Forever: Howard Zahniser and the Path to the
Wilderness Act*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2005. xviii,
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One of the most visionary and successful advocates of wilderness in the
twentieth century is a person few Americans have any knowledge of today.
Howard Zahniser (1906-1964) was a bureaucrat, editor, manager and
lobbyist who lived most of his working life in Washington, DC. In 1945, he
accepted the executive secretary position with the Wilderness Society, and
became a consummate manager and institution builder, who helped turn a
small group of naturalists into an important conservation lobby. During his
tenure, the Society's membership increased ten-fold to over 25,000
members. His legacy included the growth of nationally protected wilderness
from nine million acres to the more than 100 million acres that now make up
the National Wilderness Preservation System. To safeguard wilderness by
law became his chief focus and life's work.

Zahniser wanted to keep wilderness as wild as possible, but faced fierce
opposition from resort developers and commodity industries, including
mining, timber, and petroleum. The book details many of his battles -- for
example, his successful efforts to expand the Grand Teton National Park, the
preservation of the Boundary Waters area, and his triumph over the
proposed Echo Park Dam -- as well as battles that resulted in compromise or
failure. Opponents of wilderness preservation frequently labeled such
projects as elitist, that is, preserving pristine lands for use by a few. He
fought hard to gain acceptance of the idea that wilderness was for all to use,
and he had no wish to exclude anyone. He merely sought to preserve such
areas for those who chose to go. By insisting that consumption and
commodity uses need not be reduced in order to make room for wilderness,
he gained many needed allies in the efforts to preserve designated areas.

Zahniser loved crafting language, a role that played well in his editorial
duties of the Society's magazine, *Living Wilderness*, as well as in his many
letters, opinion pieces and legislative drafts. He was able to turn out
comprehensive statements on the value of wilderness during a time of
enormous post-war growth and development in the country. He loved the

use of the word "untrammelled" to distinguish wilderness from other lands. One of his central convictions was that nature is part of our world and should be embraced in daily life. This ideology carried through in all he did, especially in the many drafts he created between 1957 and 1964 for the Wilderness Act, which was signed into law by President Johnson on September 3, 1964, approximately four months after Zahniser's death.

The book represents a solid addition to the body of literature on conservationists and the development of wilderness areas. The author, Mark Harvey, professor of history at North Dakota State University, Fargo, effectively presents Zahniser's thinking by utilizing a number of quotes from Zahniser's writings, including his day-by-day chronicle. Harvey also gathered material from archival files and numerous interviews, including family members. The book contains an index, references, and a selected bibliography, and is highly recommended for the lay reader as well as the scholar.

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