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INTRODUCTION

IT'S OUR JOB, A JOB FOR ALL OF US

Perhaps I do seem aggressively radical to many of them but it is because I have to scrap continually and in a somewhat radical fashion to get any consideration whatever. I am not done with recreation in National Forests when I leave. I will not be muzzled by censorship that exists in the department and while I am not going to do any “muckraking” I will be free to tell my ideas and views without restriction.

—ARTHUR CARHART, 1921¹

Arthur Carhart’s centrist ideas about water and wilderness make him a good guide for some of the choices ordinary citizens must make today. Conservation politics have become polarized in ways that may benefit the blindly partisan but that will only harm our public lands. As we look to a future where climate change will dominate land management, we should give the past a vote by examining Arthur Carhart’s life. We should keep in mind Carhart’s prophetic way of linking water and wilderness.

Climate change is affecting our public lands—particularly the high-altitude areas we have designated as Wilderness.² Which changes are good and which are bad? We will lose many species and ecological communities permanently. That is a great tragedy. But we are also gaining some surprises. Aspen (and the rich ecosystem aspen supports) is appearing at timberline sites where aspen did not exist in Carhart’s time.³ Meanwhile, lower-elevation aspen stands are suddenly dying.

In a related development, the Trappers Lake watershed in northwestern Colorado, “the Cradle of Wilderness,” burned in 2002. As precipitation patterns change and snowmelt occurs earlier and earlier, how will the 17,000-acre “Big Fish Fire” affect the ecological health of this hallowed watershed? Scientists are predicting a 50 percent reduction in stream flow by 2050 in western Colorado.⁴ We will need to reconsider the tools we make available to land managers as we confront such changes. How can we learn to think beyond designated Wilderness to larger landscapes with buffer zones that will accommodate climate change?

One of the tools we need to reexamine is the Wilderness Act of 1964, which was not written in stone and genome. Partly with Carhart’s help, it evolved over the decades since he took his courageous stand against roads and cabins at Trappers Lake in 1919. And it has continued to evolve since then, as Congress adds more wilderness areas and we learn more about managing wilderness. But now we are facing change on a scale that challenges many of our assumptions about what we are protecting as wilderness and why we are protecting it. As wilderness changes, so should the Wilderness Act.

“The first rule of intelligent tinkering is to save all the parts.” Environmentalists are fond of quoting Aldo Leopold. As ecologists try to understand climate change, they are learning that Leopold’s science has become outdated. Ecosystems often have redundancy built into them. Some parts are more important than others. As land managers deal with climate change, they need ecologists to guide them. Which parts are important and why?

Yet Leopold’s wisdom endures in another way. Which values should we preserve? As we tinker with the environment, one intelligent thing to do is to recover some key “parts” from our past. That is my goal in this biography of Arthur Carhart, wilderness prophet. We ignore his life story at our peril. Carhart’s thinking about wilderness offers a commonsense, nonpartisan, democratic approach to administering and—where necessary—changing the laws and the institutions that manage our natural resources. In 1961 Carhart wrote:

Those who have been lumping all types and concepts of wildlands together and calling them all “wilderness,” particularly those who insist that only where the natural environment is absolute, truly virgin, can there be “wilderness,” may protest these listings [of wildland recreation zones]. To argue that “wilderness” is anything less than physically “virgin” may be heresy. If so, I am a heretic. I do not argue that there can be any gradations of virginity. I do argue that there may be gradations in the physical attributes representing the wildness of wildlands which, as in other areas of human experience, may be as gratifying to those associating with it as absolute virginity—perhaps even more so.⁵

Obscurity and ostracism became Carhart's "rewards" for questioning the environmental orthodoxy of his times. Carhart never lacked courage. And it took courage for the "father of wilderness" to withhold his support for a Wilderness Act that fell short, in his eyes, of what America needed.

In the decade before its final passage in 1964, the Wilderness Act (PL 88-577) went through sixty-six drafts and eighteen congressional hearings. President Lyndon B. Johnson signed it into law on September 3, 1964. As the horse trading progressed, Arthur Carhart became more and more dismayed with the results. There would be no buffer zones around wilderness, no attempt to place designated wilderness into a watershed-wide plan. Especially repugnant to him were the provisions that favored special interests, such as grazing and mining. Among many other problems, the final act compromised present and future wilderness designation, in Carhart's mind, because it allowed the continuation of existing grazing permits, regardless of ecological condition. It also gave the mining industry until 1983 to make claims and then develop them at its leisure. And it did not allow for the integrated planning that should include buffer zones around wilderness.⁶

Ironically, Carhart the centrist became a heretic in the eyes of many in the wilderness movement. Carhart's friend, Howard Zahniser of the Wilderness Society, had led the long, exhausting battle to hammer out a bill. In deference to many such friends in the wilderness movement, Carhart did not openly work against the final bill during the summer and fall of 1964. As the election campaign ground on, it became clear that a wilderness bill would help the Democratic Party. Ever the maverick, Carhart was supporting Republican Barry Goldwater in that campaign while backing the reelection of Democratic Congressman Wayne Aspinall of Colorado. Carhart felt Goldwater, as a fiscal conservative, would be less likely to pursue an expensive ground war in Southeast Asia and more likely to cut funding for the Bureau of Reclamation. Carhart knew that, when the time finally came, only Aspinall could deliver a wilderness bill that would have broad public support. Meanwhile, many conservationists were opposing Aspinall, who was present at the signing of the Wilderness Act along with Mardy Murie, Alice Zahniser, and Interior Secretary Stewart Udall.

The bill included wording by Zahniser that did not fit Carhart's sense of the place of humans *in nature*, *not* outside of nature: "A wilderness, in contrast with those areas where man and his own works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognized as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain." Carhart balked at this language because he knew too much about the place in nature that Native Americans had occupied. Zahniser's eloquence outlived its

author. Exhausted, Zahniser had died four months before the bill was finally signed. Thus, he missed the signing event in the Oval Office, just as Carhart did.

Perhaps wilderness is best understood as the chief pillar of a secular twentieth-century religion, best articulated in Aldo Leopold's *Sand County Almanac*. The religious are quicker to punish heretics than they are to pursue unbelievers. Anonymity and suspicion have been Carhart's posthumous "reward" for a lifetime of conservation advocacy. The touchstone for wilderness history, Roderick Nash's *Wilderness and the American Mind*, has gone through many reprintings and four editions since its first appearance in 1967. Nash barely mentions Carhart. But Nash did go further in the Wilderness Society's magazine, acknowledging Carhart's true stature as a major conservation figure. Among environmental historians, Nash stands almost alone.⁷ This book tries to explain why.

PERHAPS I DO SEEM AGGRESSIVELY RADICAL

Carhart is a good guide to such questions—not because he was always "right" but because his long career provides us with examples of how to change and how to learn. He was there at the beginning, after all, before the big dams arose, before the United States had a wilderness movement, and before we made the fateful, flawed choices that contribute to the degradation of both the environment and our politics.

Arthur Carhart (1892–1978) was one of the most significant conservationists of the twentieth century. Wallace Stegner said: "I have been convinced for a long time that what is miscalled the middle of the road is actually the most radical and the most difficult position—much more difficult and radical than either reaction or rebellion."⁸ Carhart belongs in the company of such giants as Stegner and Aldo Leopold. That is why an interagency consortium still maintains the Arthur Carhart National Wilderness Training Center in Missoula, Montana, along with the Aldo Leopold Wilderness Research Institute.⁹ And that is why Trappers Lake in northwestern Colorado and the Boundary Waters Canoe Area in Minnesota continue to inspire us. They should also inspire healthy debate about the idea of wilderness and the practice of wilderness management within the larger context of planning for America's wildlands.

As a lifelong moderate Republican, Carhart felt federal resource management bureaucracies were often the problem rather than the solution because they put their own welfare above the public good—and above the good of wildlife.¹⁰ In contrast, Carhart's sensible, balanced approach locates planning and democratic institutions at the scale of an individual watershed, much as John

Wesley Powell recommended when he reported to Congress about the West.¹¹ Carhart wrote:

The responsibility for water management rests in the hands of the fellow who puts a plow-share into the soil, and how he does it. It rests in the hands of the stockman—and he commits a crime against the community if in his greed he so over-grazes his range it becomes a tin roof to produce floods, mud and disaster below. Responsibility for sound water management also lies in the hands of the municipal water division of a community, in the city officials, in the chamber of commerce, in the national bodies of business and industry—it's our job, a job for all of us.¹²

Carhart wrote about conservation issues for many business-oriented publications, and he specialized in addressing business conventions. He thought Powell's ideas about watershed democracies should appeal to Americans of every stripe. In a 1952 talk, "The Future Course in Water Management," to the Annual Conference of the American Water Works Association, he said:

I propose, now and here, that the organization directing inclusive management of the water wealth, and the soil wealth with it, should not be imposed from the top, but developed out of the minds and actions of those on the ground and in the field. I propose an organization of what might be termed a water resources planning and policy board, for every minor watershed in the nation—every creek, if you please. . . . Not an imposition of what to do from the top, but a development of policy and broad planning rising up from the grass-roots citizenry.¹³

Not everyone sees centrism when they look at Powell and Carhart. Donald Worster, Powell's most recent biographer, says:

The Achilles heel of American environmentalism is the fact that, despite all their calls for government activism and regulatory power, environmentalists in their heart of hearts share the same ideology of liberty and self-determination that has created a degraded environment. The distance between the "wilderness freedom" of an Abbey or a Muir and the "economic freedom" of laissez-faire capitalism may at times not be very great. This confusing overlap of a liberty seeking ideology with its enemies may constitute the greatest embarrassment the wilderness movement has, one that even its most thoughtful philosophers have never fully addressed or clarified.¹⁴

Worster conflates environmentalists with wilderness advocates, a mistake Carhart taught us to avoid by insisting that wilderness management was only part of watershed-wide wildlands planning. Then Worster assumes that all environmentalists favor a strong regulatory role for the government, something Carhart warned against as early as 1922 when he was preparing to

leave the Forest Service and begin his difficult relationships with the Bureau of Biological Survey and the Bureau of Reclamation. Finally, Worster caricatures liberty and self-determination, as if they inevitably lead to the excesses of capitalism and the degradation of the environment. But Carhart, who lived through the 1920s and endured the Depression and who actually worked in many different government bureaucracies, showed us how we might find a middle way.

One goal of this biography is to share with readers not just the social and political relevance of Carhart's conservationist conscience but also his homespun artistry and eloquence. More than any other twentieth-century conservationist, Carhart emphasized individual freedom and power within the rules of the game set by government to guide our conduct. His Iowa-based brand of rugged individualism may be repugnant to those who prefer restraint and humility based on knowing one's proper place—and for whom such individualism is dangerous, both morally and ecologically. Carhart's father wanted him to be an Iowa bookkeeper. It was his mother, an artist, who insisted that he be free to choose. He chose wilderness—and the West.

Where does a man like Carhart fit within the history of the West? Although he was one of the primary fathers of wilderness, Arthur Carhart was not a dour wilderness philosopher but an accomplished landscape architect and an artful storyteller. With a twinkle in his eye, he constantly shuffled the deck, reinventing himself and the idea of wilderness as the century advanced and environmental conditions changed. And yet his wilderness was always inhabited, a place both peopled and storied, not simply roadless and undeveloped.

Instead of the extremes represented by Edward Abbey and John Muir, Carhart bears comparison with Aldo Leopold. The two Forest Service employees met in Denver in December 1919. After Leopold had read of upstart Carhart's wilderness initiative at Trappers Lake, he rode the train north from Albuquerque to meet the Forest Service's first landscape architect, who bore the formal title "Recreation Engineer." The two Iowans shared their ideas, based on Carhart's remarkable proposal that the Forest Service should manage Trappers Lake for wilderness recreation instead of summer homes and the roads needed to access those homes. Both men shared a love for Teddy Roosevelt's way—for hunting and fishing in wilderness settings like Trappers Lake, playing within "the rules of the game and the laws of the land," as Carhart put it.

A few years later Carhart quit the Forest Service, disgusted with its failure to support adequate funding for recreation planning and its halfhearted effort to partner with local citizens' groups in watershed-based wildlands planning. In contrast, acting through federal fiat, Leopold helped create the first Wilderness Reserve on the Gila National Forest in New Mexico in 1924. And

yet, as men of their time, both Carhart and Leopold struggled with deep ambivalence about the roles of predators and wildfires in wildlands management.

From his position outside the federal resource management bureaucracies, Carhart continued to fight for fifty years on behalf of watershed-wide management for places like Trappers Lake, Boundary Waters, and Echo Park. Over the course of a long life that was denied to Leopold, Carhart reinvented himself many times, for he wrote fiction, which Leopold did not.¹⁵ He lived to see Echo Park saved, which Leopold did not, only to see Glen Canyon Dam truss up the wild Colorado River. He lived to witness the unruly spirit of wilderness bound within the Wilderness Act of 1964, which Leopold did not. And after half a century of wilderness advocacy, Carhart, the father of wilderness, could not support the Wilderness Act as it finally emerged. This book explains the many reasons why. From Carhart's populist point of view, the Wilderness Act was deeply flawed for yet another reason that grates on the ears of some environmentalists: the act rewards special interests at the expense of true public interest.

Carhart wrote for the common people. At the end of one of his many books about hunting, published in 1946 when soldiers were readjusting to civilian life, he addressed his readers: "It's something American that calls you back, the free America, where it is a birthright to bear arms, where you have the privilege of the sovereign to hunt without let or hindrance, except for the rules of the game and the laws of the land that you and your brothers have set up to guide human conduct. So you're going out next season again? Fine. I may see you out there. Good luck, and I hope you get your buck."¹⁶

As with his thinking about wilderness, Carhart's writing appealed to a broad, popular audience. He was a "populist" in the best sense of the term. He knew how to reach ordinary people with his conservation ideas. His numerous books and articles made him America's most widely read conservation writer in the mid-twentieth century.¹⁷

Part of Carhart's appeal to the common reader was that he pioneered a then-revolutionary aesthetic: if we plan and manage wisely, the beauty of America's wildlands will make us not just better individuals but also better members of our local community—and even better Americans. By this he meant independent people who do not rely on federal bureaucracies to subsidize their particular special interest, be it ranching or recreation. Seeking the middle way, so elusive today, Carhart knew when to compromise and when to take a hard stand, especially when it came to dealing with federal resource bureaucracies. Carhart's decision not to support the Wilderness Act is no mystery. After a lifetime of trying to work with federal bureaucracies, he felt the act favored the special interests that had learned to manipulate agencies like the Forest Service through congressional budgetary procedures. Thus, wilderness

became whatever deal could be brokered among competing national interests. Carhart did not like generic, national approaches. He preferred the local.¹⁸

Although he considered reform of the Bureau of Reclamation a hopeless cause, Carhart tried, especially in his fiction, to imagine a better Forest Service that could be trusted to manage wilderness. In 1964, dismayed by the pro-grazing provisions of the Wilderness Act, he told his old friend and fellow Republican Joe Penfold of the Izaak Walton League:

At the start, if you don't know already, I can state flatly that I have the most thorough dislike for "burocracy" that one can have. I've been inside and outside and I don't like the thing that is "burocracy." I've tried to analyze it, to get my own definition as to where that pertains. A bureau starts out to do a public service. For a time that spirit dominates. The intent of the organization's being is dominant in its actions. At some point the perpetuation of the bureau becomes the guiding spirit, and then we have "burocracy." Some day I hope to write a novel on this subject.¹⁹

Other aspects of the Wilderness Act that bothered Carhart were its failure to address the management of predators and wildfires. Carhart remained profoundly ambivalent about these difficult issues. He could remember the great fires of 1910, when smoke from burning national forests in Montana darkened the skies of Iowa. He had an ear for old songs, and he remembered this one in 1959:

Run Boys, Run, there's fire in the mountains,
Fire in the mountains, fire in the mountains!

The song my father sang while I was still a little boy had folk ballad quality. It never was clear to me whether those lyrics commanded one to run from the fire or race to put it out. A touch of panic rode in the repeated phrase, "Run boys, run!"²⁰

Similar ambivalence dogged Carhart's writing about predators. Carhart was not infallible regarding every conservation issue. Instead, he was right about his faith in our democracy's ability to experiment and to learn from the conservation failures he called "bunk." In 1929, Mary Austin sent Carhart her strongly positive review of his *Last Stand of the Pack*, a book about how the federal Bureau of Biological Survey had systematically exterminated the last wolves in the West. Boldly speaking for himself—and not his coauthor, Stanley P. Young—Carhart replied, "My sympathy too was with the old renegades; and I think the hunters felt somewhat the same way. Personally, I feel that we are floundering dangerously and ridiculously with our wildlife. A lot of so-called conservation is bunk."²¹

How do we know the “bunk” from the wisdom that will guide us to a modestly successful future in land management? Carhart’s long career shows us how to learn new lessons and old—from others and from the land. He does what true conservation should do: he gives the past a vote.

Each of the chapters that follow begins with an introduction that summarizes the chapter’s major themes. Subsequent sections examine those themes at greater length.

NOTES

1. The letters and most of the materials in the Carhart Collection at the Denver Public Library are arranged chronologically in the Conservation Collection. For the Finding Aid, see <http://eadsrv.denverlibrary.org/sdx/pl/>.

2. The best Rocky Mountain guide to climate change and its effects on wilderness areas is the Mountain Studies Institute in Durango, Colorado: <http://www.mountainstudies.org/home.asp>. See also Tom Wolf, “Climate Change and the Rockies,” *Inside/Outside* (Spring 2007).

3. G. P. Elliott and W. L. Baker, “Quaking Aspen (*Populus tremuloides* Michx.) at Treeline: A Century of Change in the San Juan Mountains, Colorado, USA,” *Journal of Biogeography* 31 (2004):733–745.

4. P. M. Brown and R. Wu, “Climate and Disturbance Forcing of Episodic Tree Recruitment in a Southwestern Ponderosa Pine Landscape,” *Ecology* 86 (2004):3030–3038; Jonathan Overpeck, “Keynote Address: Global Climate Change, the West, and What We Can Do about It,” San Juan Climate Change Conference, October 11, 2006. Available through the MSI Web site (note 2).

5. Carhart, *Planning for America's Wildlands* (Harrisburg: Telegraph Press, 1961).

6. For more background on the Wilderness Act, see the Wilderness Society, *The Wilderness Act Handbook: 40th Anniversary Edition* (Washington, DC: Wilderness Society, 2004). The 1964 act designated 9.1 million acres. “Since passage of the Wilderness Act, more than 105 million acres of public lands have been designated as Wilderness, about 4.4 percent of the entire United States. But as much as 200 million additional acres of federal public lands may be suitable for Wilderness, and so we and others continue the fight to win Wilderness designation for those lands—because once an area falls victim to roads or other destructive activity, that land is no longer eligible for Wilderness designation.” Quote from the Wilderness Society’s Web site: <http://www.wilderness.org>.

7. Roderick Nash, “Arthur Carhart: Wilderness Advocate.” *The Living Wilderness* (December 1980): 32–34; Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001 [1967]), 185–186, 208.

8. Wallace Stegner, quoted in John L. Thomas, *A Country of the Mind: Wallace Stegner, Bernard DeVoto, History and the American Land* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 109. The context is Stegner writing about Joe Hill, the labor leader and Wobbly. The Ludlow Massacre (April 20, 1914) was fresh in Coloradoans’ minds when Carhart

arrived in 1919. Concerned about steelworkers from Pueblo having access to the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, Carhart was convinced that the wilderness experience should be available to every potential Joe Hill. I am indebted to Richard Eutalain for the Stegner quote.

9. <http://carhart.wilderness.net/>.

10. See, for example, Michael Robinson, *Predatory Bureaucracy* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2005).

11. See Wallace Stegner, *Beyond the Hundredth Meridian: John Wesley Powell and the Second Opening of the American West* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1954).

12. Carhart, *Water or Your Life* (New York: Lippincott, 1951), 195.

13. "The Future Course in Water Management," speech given at the Annual Conference of the American Water Works Association, Kansas City, MO, May 3, 1952. Carhart Collection, Denver Public Library (hereafter CC, DPL).

14. Donald Worster, "Wild, Tame, and Free: Comparing Canadian and American Views of Nature," in Ken Coates and John Findlay, eds., *On Brotherly Terms: Canadian-American Relations West of the Rockies* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002). See also Worster, *A River Running West: John Wesley Powell* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

15. Leopold wrote a sort of fiction when he needed to make a point. He clearly fudged the chronology of his conversion from a wolf killer to a wilderness lover. See, among others, William deBuys, "Uncle Aldo: A Legacy of Learning about Learning," University of New Mexico School of Architecture and Planning: John Gaw Meem Lecture Series/Annual Aldo Leopold Lecture, March 9, 2004. Available from the author.

16. Arthur Carhart, *Hunting North American Deer* (New York: Macmillan, 1946), 277.

17. My pursuit of Carhart's middle way led me back to his boyhood roots in Iowa. At the University of Iowa I discovered among his papers a 1954 pitch to Alfred Knopf that he write a series of conservation-oriented boy's books of which *Son of the Forest* (already published in 1952) would be the first. Carhart proposed a novel on the planned Echo Park Dam: "My characters were to be the son of one of those men in Reclamation who question the wisdom of some of those gigantic dams." The manuscript for *Son of an Engineer* still eludes me; the son in the title was the son of William H. Wolf, associate chief engineer of the Bureau of Reclamation and chief design engineer for Glen Canyon Dam.

18. A good example occurred during the latest revision of the White River National Forest's plan. Responding to national money, Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell (R-Colorado) monkey wrenched a painstaking planning process that had involved local and regional interests. Campbell was repaying a political debt related to funding for the Bureau of Reclamation's Animas-LaPlata Project, a pork project worthy of the great days of the 1960s. See Tom Wolf, "The Animas-La Plata Project," *The Los Angeles Times*, June 22, 1998; Wolf, "Why We Should Not Fund the Animas-La Plata Project," *Engineering News-Record*, June 1998.

19. Letter from Carhart to Joe Penfold, December 21, 1964, CC, DPL.

20. Carhart, *Timber in Your Life* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1955), 261.

21. Letter from Carhart to Mary Austin, January 14, 1930, CC, DPL, appreciating her review of *Last Stand of the Pack* in "The Saturday Review of Literature." Carhart wrote *Last Stand of the Pack* (New York: J. H. Sears, 1929) in collaboration with Stanley P. Young of the Bureau of Biological Survey.