

# **Beyond Naturalness: Desired Future Conditions for Protected Area Ecosystems Given Irreversible Human Impact**

## *A Workshop*

**Focus:** Wilderness areas, parks and other protected areas have management objectives that stress the maintenance of natural conditions. With each passing year, however, we learn more about severe impacts to wilderness and park ecosystems caused by such threats as climate change, invasive species, and air pollution. Clearly we need to do what we can to shield protected areas from these threats (e.g. try to keep invasives out, minimize fire suppression, etc.). But these efforts can only be partially successful. The inevitability and pervasiveness of human impact make naturalness, in the traditional sense of the word, an objective that is not attainable. While we could strive to keep protected area ecosystems as natural as possible, such efforts would be costly and require substantial manipulation, with uncertain results and potentially less than desirable outcomes. Furthermore, as human impacts continue, clarity on what is natural and what is not will diminish over time.

Protected area managers need to set goals regarding the ecological conditions for the areas they manage. We need to carefully consider which concepts, symbols, and/or characteristics are most appropriate for the future of wilderness and park ecosystems. Should we look to resilience, biodiversity conservation, or other goals to guide our future stewardship activities?

**Goals:** This workshop will bring together a small group of scientists and managers to generate and discuss goals and objectives for ecological conditions and management of protected areas, recognizing the limitations of the naturalness concept and the need for more proactive and complementary concepts.

**Format:** Short presentations, discussion, and facilitated dialogue.

**Pework:** Participants will be asked to develop short papers on specific topics prior to the workshop.

**Outcomes:**

- Identify critical issues and challenges
- Agree on most promising ways to move forward
- Make recommendations for research and management (if desired)
- Publish workshop results as a proceedings, paper, or book
- Additional follow-up work as determined by the group

**Where:** Lubrecht Forest, College of Forestry and Conservation, University of Montana

**When:** April 3-5, 2007

**Sponsors/** Aldo Leopold Wilderness Research Institute (David Cole)  
**Organizers:** Wilderness Institute, University of Montana (Laurie Yung)  
Rocky Mountains Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Unit (Kathy Tonnessen (NPS)  
and Lisa Gerloff (UM))

**Participants: NGO**

Greg Aplet, The Wilderness Society  
Craig Groves, Wildlife Conservation Society\*\*  
John Randall, The Nature Conservancy

**Academia**

Terry Chapin, University of Alaska, Fairbanks  
Eric Higgs, University of Victoria\*  
Peter White, University of North Carolina  
Pam Wright, University of Northern British Columbia\*  
Erika Zavaleta, University of California, Santa Cruz

**Agency**

Dave Graber, National Park Service  
Peter Landres, Aldo Leopold Wilderness Research Institute  
Dave Parsons, Aldo Leopold Wilderness Research Institute  
Nate Stephenson, USGS  
Stephen Woodley, Parks Canada

*\*tentative yes pending schedule for Spring*

*\*\*participation has not been confirmed*