

# Friends of Scotchman Continue to Climb

by Kate Wilson

Some folks use the term “an act of god” to signal the difficulty and/or miraculous intervention needed to make something happen. To me, an “act of Congress” has the same kind of tone. Especially at this point in time, when we’re talking about the need to protect our wild and open spaces, our roadless and rough lands, our jagged mountain peaks and intermittent streams, that kind of action seems difficult to come by. But this does not stop one vivacious group from giving it their all.

The Friends of the Scotchman Peaks has been active since their inception in 2005, when citizens of North Idaho and western Montana were following the Panhandle National Forest Plan process and discovered something big...the Scotchmans have been managed as a potential Wilderness Area since the 1970s! The problem? Hardly anyone knew.

“The use of Forest Service land for timber production, thinning for forest health, fire safety, and recreation dominated the early forest plan meetings,” says Phil Hough, chair and co-founder of the Friends of Scotchman Peaks. “Being overlooked was the fact that the best use for much backcountry is no use at all. Leaving it alone, as wilderness, leaves its highest value intact.”

The 88,000 acre Scotchman Peaks span the Idaho-Montana border, roughly 60 miles south of British Columbia, Canada. Located in the Cabinet Mountains and perched high above Lake Pend Oreille and the Clark Fork River, Scotchman Peak is the highest point in Bonner County, Idaho, at 7,009 feet. The area is bordered by Highway 200 to the south, the Bull River in western Montana to the east, Rattle Pass Road to the north, and Lightning Creek to the west.

In North Idaho, though there are many large tracts of open space and wild land, none are protected. Northwestern Montana, too, has a fair share of unprotected lands, with only one designated Wilderness Area—the 94,000-acre Cabinet Mountains Wilderness Area. This entire region is experiencing an alarming growth rate, and the potential for breaking up and/or developing these open spaces is fast becoming an imminent danger.

“In the face of increasing population pressure, we

want this area to remain the same as it always has been,” says Neil Wimberley, board member and Hope/Clark Fork Outreach Director.

Though there are three other areas proposed for wilderness designation, the Selkirk Crest, Longs Canyon (southwest of Bonners Ferry), and the Salmo-Priest, the Scotchmans seem to have the best chance of overcoming the obstacles and becoming a protected wilderness. Hough cites the biggest challenge of the Friends of Scotchman Peaks to date as overcoming the myths surrounding the concept of wilderness.

Recently, Hough was the recipient of a prestigious award given by the Idaho

mountain goat, bull trout, Canadian lynx, wolf and wolverine. The Cabinet Mountains comprise 58 percent of the Cabinet-Yaak Grizzly Bear Recovery Area, where there are approximately 30 to 40 grizzly bears. The mountain goat is a popular subject for the lenses of many hikers in the area, and numbers hover on the edge of a sustainable population. Of course, one may find many deer, moose, elk, black bear, coyotes, bobcat, and cougar too.

The National Wilderness Preservation System was created on September 3, 1964, when President Lyndon B. Johnson signed The Wilderness Act - eight years after the first wilderness bill was introduced by



The proposed Scotchman Peaks Wilderness Area is home to the endangered grizzly bear, as well as other threatened or sensitive animals such as the mountain goat (pictured above). Photo by Phil Hough

Conservation League. The Keith and Pat Award for Environmental Activism was created in 1995; it is named after two long-time ICL members dedicated to conservation causes.

“[The award] is statewide recognition of what we’re doing,” says Friends of Scotchman Peaks secretary and grant writer Carol Jenkins. “It is very well deserved.”

The Scotchman Peaks are home to numerous grizzly bear, a species federally listed as endangered, as well as other threatened or sensitive animals such as the

Senator Hubert H. Humphrey. This original bill established 9.1 million acres of federally protected wilderness in national forests. According to The Wilderness Society, the law did not increase the amount of land under federal control, nor did it mandate acquisition of additional lands. The Wilderness Act of 1964 describes a wilderness 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.” The Act requires that wilderness areas be “administered for