

PERSPECTIVES FROM THE
ALDO LEOPOLD WILDERNESS RESEARCH INSTITUTE

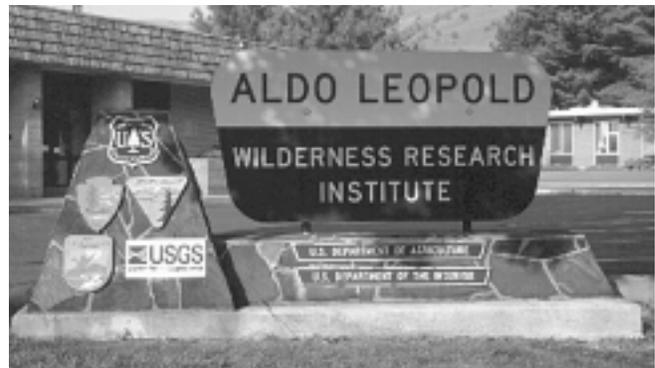
Reducing Barriers to Science-based Management

BY VITA WRIGHT

Each of the United States federal wilderness management agencies requires access to the best available scientific information to meet legislative and policy mandates. Scientists, including those in federal agencies and universities, have worked diligently to develop and publish scientific knowledge to support policy and management decisions. However, wilderness managers report a variety of barriers to their ability to access and use scientific information. These barriers include, but are not limited to, heavy workloads and a lack of time to search for scientific information, a large body of seemingly irrelevant research, the absence of research on specific topics, contradictory research results, publications written for scientific audiences, lack of training, and managers' attitudes toward science.

Working cooperatively with the federal wilderness management agencies (Bureau of Land Management, Fish and Wildlife Service, Forest Service, National Park Service, and U.S. Geological Survey), the Aldo Leopold Wilderness Research Institute (Leopold Institute) strives to develop and apply the science needed to sustain wilderness resources and values. To improve the application of wilderness science, the Leopold Institute initiated its Research Application Program (RAP) in 1999. The RAP is dedicated to understanding and minimizing barriers to the use of science by managers. This includes increasing access to and understanding of scientific information, as well as identifying information needs.

Researchers and managers can work together to improve research application through two avenues: (1) identifying pertinent questions for future research, and (2) exchanging information about research results that are already available. Several national agency efforts were implemented to identify future research needs as well as to improve collaboration between scientists and managers. However, less attention has been given to helping



managers search through the plethora of currently available research information.

Recognizing that managers have limited time to search for scientific information, the Leopold Institute's RAP has focused early efforts on improving access to scientific information. Specifically, the RAP has been working to organize research results by subject, so managers working in short time frames can quickly access pertinent information. Managers can now search for Leopold Institute publications as well as current and past research project descriptions by subject on a website (<http://leopold.wilderness.net>). Additionally, a new series of annotated reading lists summarizes existing knowledge about broad topics such as managing fire, visitor experiences, user fees, and invasive plants in wilderness. The most relevant publications are annotated and organized according to subtopics that allow managers to easily find publications addressing the specific issues in which they are interested (<http://leopold.wilderness.net/resapp.htm>).

Developing personal relationships between researchers and managers may ultimately be the most effective solution to the need for better communication about scientific information; however, in the face of increasing workloads and

Continued on page 12

larger organization such as the Society of American Foresters Wilderness Working Group. The fundamental challenge lies in the unique composition of wilderness values. Each existing organization was developed with fairly clear missions and scope. We are unsure of where the development of a wilderness stewardship professional fits within those various missions.

Conclusion

In welcoming readers to the first issues of *IJW* in 1995, John Hendee expressed that after 20 years of discussion about a wilderness journal that “the time is right.” Given the success of the journal and several other initiatives over the past 12 years, it is clear that he was correct. The idea of a wilderness profession has been discussed for over a decade and perhaps the time is right for that as well. We would like to envision a future in which students could get degrees in wilderness stewardship that would prepare them for

From ALDO LEOPOLD on page 19

limited travel funding, this is often not possible. Therefore, in addition to conducting site visits and giving presentations at management workshops, the Leopold Institute intends to continue synthesizing existing information on key wilderness issues. We will also continue to identify barriers to research application as well as potential solutions. While research results are interesting to inquiring minds, they are of little use to wilderness stewardship when managers are not aware of relevant results. 

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long and rich careers dedicated to the protection of our global wilderness treasures. Moreover, we would like to see an integrated and collaborative system of wilderness stewardship forged across the four wilderness management agencies in the United States. Given the institutional and disciplinary fragmentation of wilderness stewardship professionals, we see these goals as a continued uphill climb. The voice of a committed critical mass of wilderness stewards could be an important development, and a professional society for wilderness stewardship could be that voice. 

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From EMERGING PRINCIPLES on page 27

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