

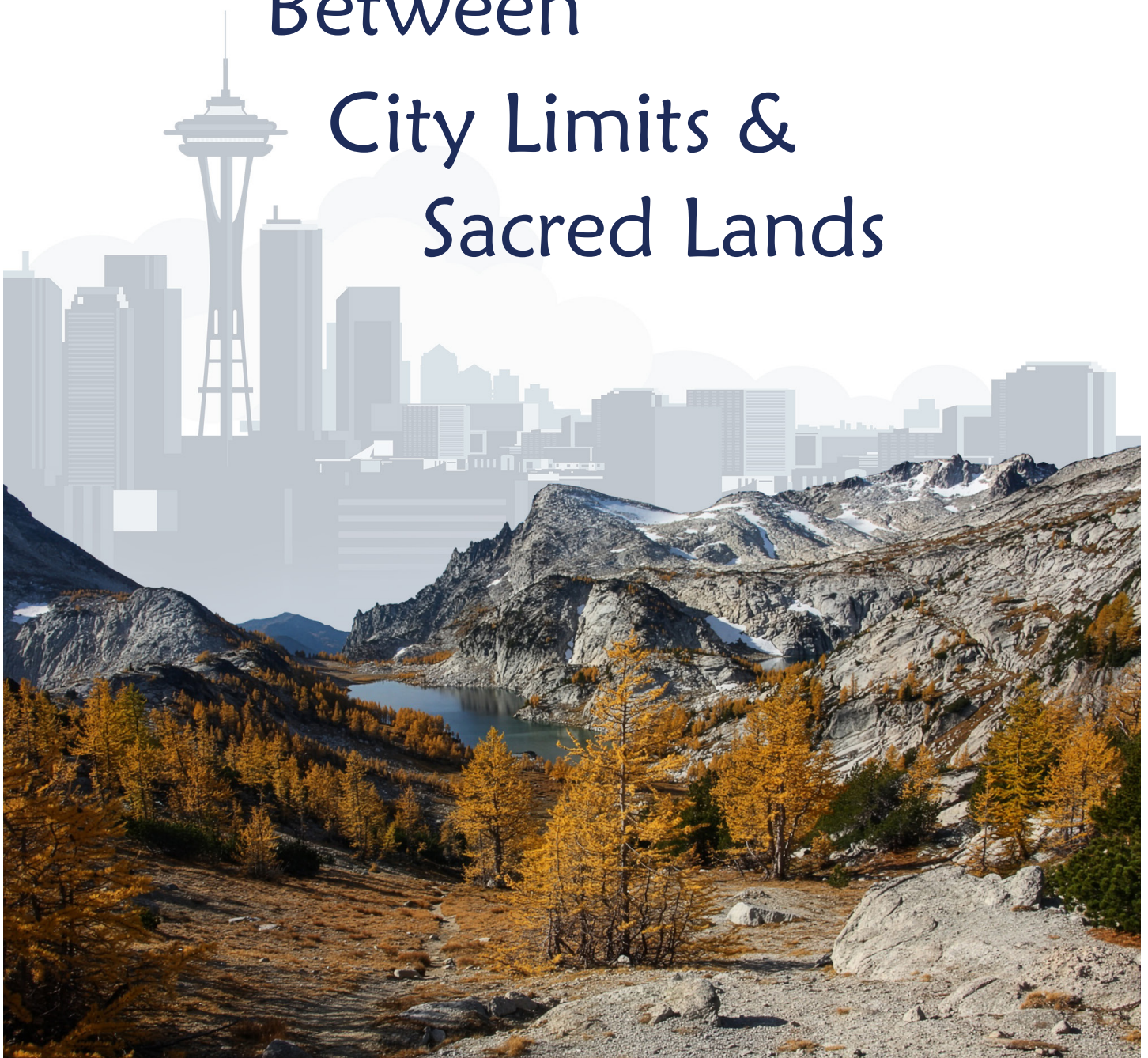
*An educational guide to the documentary film*

# THE WILD NEXT DOOR

Between

City Limits &

Sacred Lands



*Version 1 (April 2026)*

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## ABOUT THIS FILM AND EDUCATIONAL GUIDE

[The Wild Next Door: Between City Limits & Sacred Lands](#) is a 38-minute documentary film that explores the complexities of managing high-use, urban-proximate wilderness in the United States. Explored through the case of the Alpine Lakes Wilderness outside of Seattle, Washington, the film highlights the many perspectives of wilderness management in an alpine landscape, including those of current and former US Forest Service managers, Snoqualmie Tribal council members, visitors, scientists, and nonprofit partners. The video also highlights how Tribal leadership and multi-actor collaboration offer opportunities to resolve the most pressing issues facing a beloved landscape.

The film was inspired by the many people who have dedicated their lives to conservation of cultural and ecological heritage, including through lands that have been protected through the 1964 Wilderness Act, a key-stone policy that protects over 110 million acres of federal public lands across the United States. Recognition that people hold many different wilderness values and that federal public lands and federally designated wilderness are Tribal homelands is foundational to our collective ability to steward these lands on behalf of past, present, and future generations. Additionally, the ability for people to return to wild spaces is one important way to reconnect with our shared humanity and deeply rooted connections to nature. As urban areas grow, the demand for access to wild spaces does, too. Wilderness areas that are readily accessible from urban centers—so-called “urban-proximate wilderness”—simultaneously offer the possibility to meet the needs of many, while they are at risk of “being loved to death”. Yet many people care about these lands. This offers unprecedented opportunities to shift towards collaborative management strategies, pool resources and efforts, and identify strategies to steward the last of our wild spaces on an increasingly interconnected planet.

This guide is designed for educators advancing interdisciplinary conversations around society and natural resource management. The guide offers key concepts, guiding questions, and activities to support learning outcomes of students of natural resource management and wilderness.

# CONTENTS

About this film and educational guide.....i

I. Learning objectives.....1

II. The paradox of wilderness management.....2

III. Viewing the Film: Key concepts and activities.....3

    Key concepts, policies, and terms.....3

    Before viewing.....5

    During viewing.....6

    After viewing.....7

IV. Otherlinks.....9



*Photo courtesy PNW Region, US Forest Service, 2011.*

## I. LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This educational guide has four main objectives:

- To improve comprehension of key wilderness concepts and other environmental policies impacting wilderness management;
- To increase understanding of the management challenges facing wilderness in urban-proximate environments;
- To support learning and critical reflection of opportunities to engage with issues impacting urban-proximate wilderness;
- To enhance dialogue around respectful recreation in wilderness.



*Photo courtesy PNW Region, US Forest Service, 2016.*

## II. The paradox of wilderness management

*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. An area of wilderness is further defined to mean in this Act an area of undeveloped Federal land retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements or human habitation, which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions and which (1) generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man's work substantially unnoticeable; (2) has outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation; (3) has at least five thousand acres of land or is of sufficient size as to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition; and (4) may also contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value.*

(Definition of wilderness according to Public Law 88-577  
"An Act to establish a National Wilderness Preservation  
System for the permanent good of the whole people,  
and for other purposes", also known as the Wilderness  
Act of 1964)

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Federal agencies, scholars, practitioners, activists, and lawyers have debated, unpacked, and considered the definitions, meanings, and interpretations of wilderness and characteristics of wilderness for over 60 years. That wilderness means many different things to many different people is a testament to its enduring values. In high-use wilderness areas, in particular those near to urban centers, those many wilderness values can come into conflict, especially as more people seek to experience the wonders of wilderness. A retired Forest Service manager shares in the film, "I've been an avid student of it [wilderness] for all these years," highlighting that there are many lessons to be learned, but perhaps no right answers. This film seeks to highlight the many layers of wilderness and wilderness management, and the paradoxes of managing wilderness according to the Wilderness Act.

### III. Viewing the Film: Key concepts and activities

#### Key concepts, policies, and terms

**Boldt Decision (1974):** *A ruling by a U.S. District Judge in 1974 that affirmed that Washington State Tribes are entitled to half of the harvestable salmon and steelhead in Washington State, assigning Tribes as co-managers of the fisheries and giving them equal authority with the State of Washington.*

**Federally designated wilderness:** *Land that Congress has designated as a part of the **National Wilderness Preservation System**, managed by one of four federal land administering agencies (Bureau of Land Management, Fish and Wildlife Service, Forest Service, and National Park Service).*

**Inherent Rights:** *Tribes hold self-governing powers as sovereign nations with inherent authority over their lands and citizens. This political status predates the founding of the United States.*

**Leave No Trace and Recreate Responsibly:** *Two different guiding frameworks with their own principles and practices to guide how people can recreate outdoors while protecting natural and cultural resources.*

**Point Elliott Treaty (1855):** *A treaty signed at Muckl-te-oh (Point Elliott or Mukilteo, Washington) between the United States government and Chiefs from Native American Tribes in the Puget Sound region of what is today Washington State. The treaty established several Tribal reservations and guaranteed fishing rights in exchange for land.*

**Recreation:** *A form of mental or physical leisure done for enjoyment, pleasure, or fun; also understood as the act of renewal.*

**Treaty Rights:** *Legal rights granted to Tribal nations through formal treaties made with the U.S. government, often enshrining access to traditional lands, resources, and cultural practices.*

**Tribal consultation:** A legally-mandated formal process for two-way dialogue between official Tribal representatives and federal agencies to discuss proposals before decisions are made.

**Urban-proximate wilderness:** An informal term used to describe federally designated wilderness areas that are easy to access from urban centers, and therefore often face pressures from high recreation access and use.

**Untrammelled:** Unrestrained, unimpeded, or unrestricted by human interference; able to act freely without constraints.



Photos, courtesy PNW Region, US Forest Service. Top left and right, Matthew Tharp, 2014. Lower right, unknown, 1968.



## Before viewing

### 1. Wilderness values and expectations:

- a. **Write:** *Think of a time you experienced wilderness or wild spaces. Where were you? Were other people there? How did they behave? Did it align with your expectations? Why or why not?*
- b. **Discuss:** *How did your upbringing or education shape your expectations for how people should behave in wild spaces? What judgments do you make of others based on their behavior in these spaces? What do these judgements or expectations say about our own values about wildness?*
- c. **Activity:** *Share your values with the group and sort them into several different categories based on similarity (e.g. utilitarian, spiritual, relational). Identify different ethos or ethics guiding those values. How might those values influence how we approach wilderness or wild spaces and their stewardship?*

### 2. Cultural connections to place:

- a. **Write:** *How did you learn about experiencing wild spaces? What did you learn from your parents or family? What did you learn from your peers? How do you think your culture and environment shape your interactions with wilderness and wild spaces?*
- b. **Discuss:** *Consider how some experiences or places in wilderness and wild spaces may be sacred. Why is it important to protect the sacred that exists on public lands from destruction?*

## During viewing

### As you watch, take note of:

1. *Who is speaking and what their relationship is to the land.*
2. *What the various issues are that are encountered in the Alpine Lakes Wilderness.*
3. *What policies are at play.*
4. *How culture influences what people understand as top issues in the wilderness.*
5. *What initiatives are being made to help steward the Alpine Lakes Wilderness.*
6. *What tensions seem unresolved.*



Photo courtesy PNW Region, US Forest Service, Matthew Tharp, 2016.

## After viewing

### 1. Alpine Lakes Wilderness values, actors, and governance:

- a. **Activity:** Referencing your notes from during the film, list the key actor groups involved in management of the Alpine Lakes Wilderness. List the major issues identified in the Alpine Lakes Wilderness. Draw connections between the actors and which issues they are responsible for managing. What patterns do you notice? Which actors appear most central or to hold the most power? Whose voice was absent?
- b. **Discuss:** How are different actor groups involved in the Alpine Lakes Wilderness responsible for navigating or resolving the various issues you identified? How did the different actor groups have to work together to resolve these issues? Which issues were unresolved? What approaches might you take to address them?

### 2. Cultural connections to place:

- a. **Think, Pair, Share:** What cultural connections to place did you identify?
- b. **Discuss:** How were partners adapting to address the shared issues to improve outcomes in wilderness? What are some other ideas that you have that could also create meaningful change?



Photos courtesy PNW Region, US Forest Service. 2008.

### 3. Wilderness access and recreation:

- a. **Activity:** *Based on what you saw in the film, what principles of respectful recreation in wilderness did you identify? List them on a board. How might these principles address some of the access-related problems facing the Alpine Lakes Wilderness?*
- b. **Discuss:** *What assumptions are embedded in those principles? When can education alone impact social and ecological conditions? When are other interventions necessary to impact conditions? What approaches did Alpine Lakes managers and partners use to address these impacts? What trade-offs can you identify between different approaches?*
- c. **Write–Capstone synthesis:** *Having watched the film and worked through these activities, return to your list from “Before viewing”. What did the film confirm, add to, or challenge in your original thinking? What tensions are inherent to urban-proximate wilderness? What good comes from many different people having access to the Alpine Lakes Wilderness, and what are the costs? How would you resolve these issues if you were in charge of managing the Alpine Lakes Wilderness?*



Photos courtesy PNW Region, US Forest Service. Left, Matthew Tharp, 2016.

## IV. Links

**View** *The Wild Next Door:  
Between City Limits & Sacred Lands*



**Learn more** *about the Aldo Leopold  
Wilderness Research Institute at*  
<https://www.leopold.wilderness.net/>



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