

WISDOM:

**A Six-step Process for Effective
Wilderness Ranger Public Contacts**

**International Wilderness Week
19-23 October 2020**



USFS R2 Rocky Mountain Region



Background

Undergrad Degree – Marketing and Economics

Masters Degree – Natural Resource Management/Specialization: Wilderness Management

Over 30 years of USFS career – from firefighter to trail crew to wilderness ranger to Regional Wilderness, Wild & Scenic River Program Manager



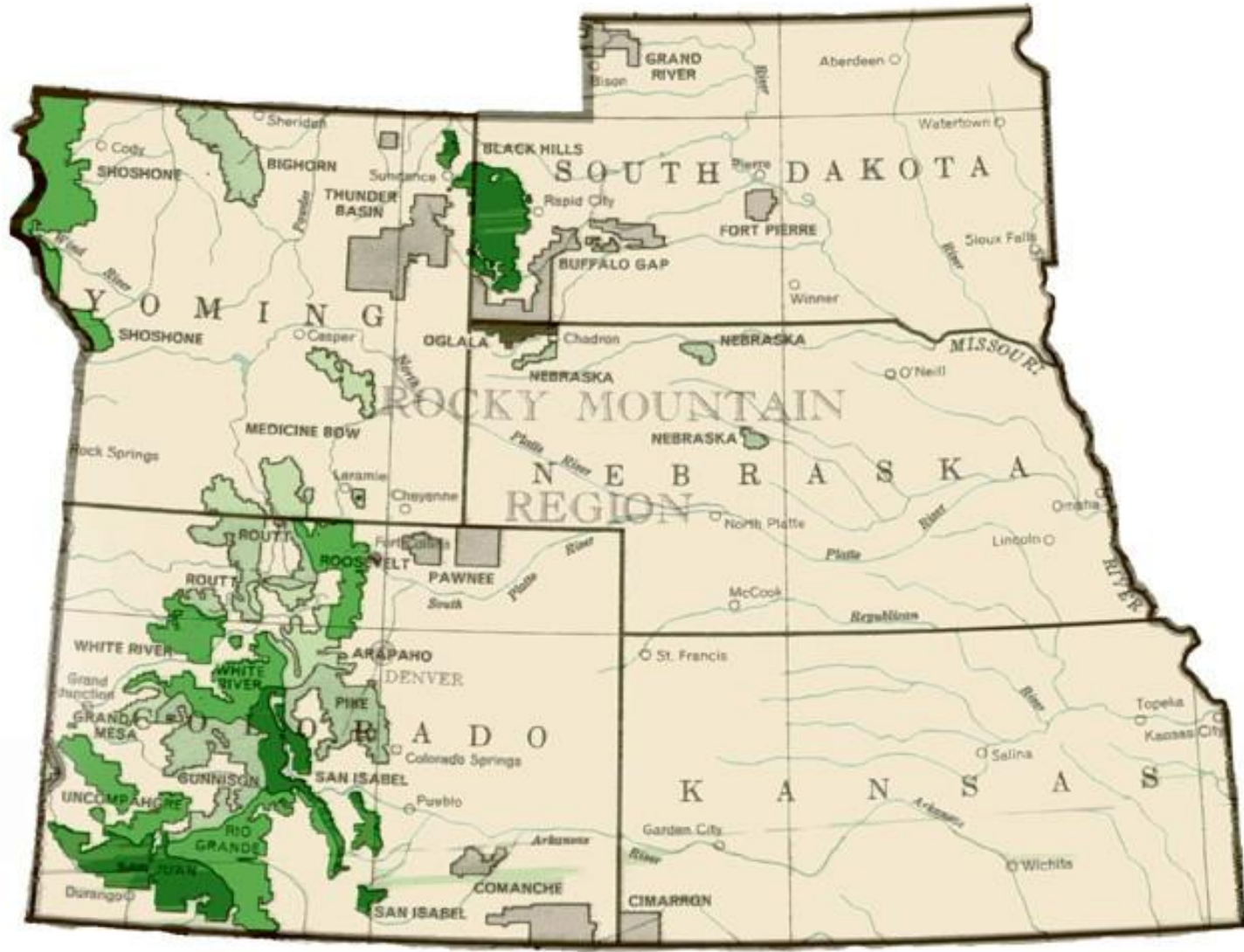
Speaker: Ralph Swain

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Rocky Mountain Region (R2)



Disclaimer:

This is not a presentation about law enforcement and wilderness violations.

Today, we will discuss how to make effective public contacts with wilderness visitors following a systematic six-step process to foster compliance and support for the wilderness resource



Current Observations – Summer of 2020

COVID Pandemic and Wilderness Visitors

- International, National and Regional articles about increased wilderness use
- Increased wilderness use by first-timers
- Wilderness Rangers challenged this year by social distancing, face mask and being COVID safe

#RecreateResponsibly

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

Check the status of the place you want to visit. If it is closed, don't go. If it's crowded, have a back up plan.

PRACTICE PHYSICAL DISTANCING

Keep your group size small. Be prepared to cover your nose and mouth and give others space. If you are sick, stay home.

PLAN AHEAD

Prepare for facilities to be closed, pack lunch, and bring essentials like hand sanitizer and a face covering.

PLAY IT SAFE

Slow down and choose lower-risk activities to reduce your risk of injury. Search and rescue operations and health care resources are both strained.

EXPLORE LOCALLY

Limit long-distance travel and make use of local parks, trails, and public spaces. Be mindful of your impact on the communities you visit.

LEAVE NO TRACE

Respect public lands and waters, as well as Native and local communities. Take all your garbage with you.

BUILD AN INCLUSIVE OUTDOORS

Be an active part of making the outdoors safe and welcoming for all identities and abilities.

7/1/2020





Wilderness Act – P.L. 88-577

- ...shall be administered for the **use and enjoyment** of the American people in such manner as will leave them unimpaired for future use and enjoyment as wilderness (section 2a)
- Except as otherwise provided in this Act, wilderness areas shall be devoted to the **public purposes of recreational,** scenic, scientific, educational, conservation, and historical use (Wilderness Act, section 4b)



Aldo Leopold

- **“We abuse the land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see the land as a community to which we belong we may begin to use it with love and respect.”**



Wilderness Ranger: Yesterday and Today



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WISDOM: Six-Step Process

RANGER (Agency Employee) and PUBLIC CONTACTS

International Wilderness Week, 19-23, 2020

Where are you coming from?

Introduce yourself

Size up the situation

Decide on a course of action

Outline/explain the violation

Make a positive impression



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Different types of Visitors, Different Regulations



Hint: Communicate with the Dog and not the Owner



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Where are you coming from?

Are you ready for your first public contact?

- Drop the baggage
- Forget about last night
- Be prepared
- Look professional – FS shield is over the heart

- Visitors deserve the best of us:



Introduce yourself

Professionally introduce yourself

- Hello, my name is Ralph Swain and I am a Wilderness Ranger here in the Weminuche Wilderness on the San Juan National Forest

- Identify yourself, your authority (WR) and your jurisdiction (Weminuche and SJNF)



Size up the situation

Be aware of your surroundings

- Gain visitor attention before entering camp location
- How many are in camp?
- Look around and know your surroundings
- Know your escape route

- If on patrol with another ranger, have your partner be a second set of eyes and ears – work as a team



Decide on a course of action

If it is a teachable moment –
proceed with a verbal
warning

- If it is a clear violation, write the violation notice
- Don't mix your intent, state your decision and stay with it

- Goal is to modify behavior and gain compliance



Explain/outline the violation

Visitors want to know WHY this rule or regulation is important

- Use Authority of the Resource techniques
(Dr. George Wallace)
- Explain how actions harm the resource
- Suggest alternatives
- Make it easy for them to comply

- “Moving your camp away from the water will benefit wildlife and you will have less mosquitoes up there on the rock bench area”



Make a positive impression

You can do your job professionally and gain compliance –

- Find your voice
- Be firm but understanding
- Be deliberate
- Be respectful

- Teachable moments don't always gain immediate results
- Example: College professor – 20 years later



Conclusion

- **The Art of “Rangering” comes with practice**
- **Know your wilderness/protected area and be the local expert**
- **Go with WISDOM and make a difference**



Information Links

Arthur Carhart National Wilderness Training Center (ACNWTC):

- <https://carhart.wilderness.net>

Aldo Leopold Wilderness Research Institute (ALWRI):

- <http://leopold.wilderness.net>

Wilderness Connect: [Wilderness Connect](#)

- <http://www.wilderness.net>
- [Toolbox: Visitor Use Management in Wilderness](#)

Leave No Trace:

- <https://lnt.org>

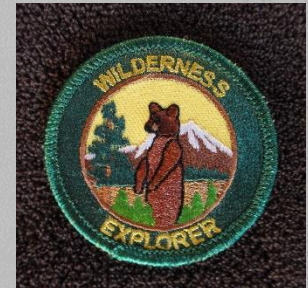
Handouts:

WISDOM one-page outline

WISDOM pocket size card

Authority of the Resource article (Dr. Wallace)

Authority of the Resource ranger scenarios



Go with WISDOM



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Questions

