

GROWING WILDERNESS

My inauguration into the world of wilderness came in the White Mountains of New Hampshire. These are my home mountains, the mountains I learned to love mountains in. Gentle-appearing from a distance but often utterly wild and fierce up close.

Most of the White Mountains are now part of the White Mountain National Forest, the largest chunk of public land in New England. A good bit has been designated by Congress as so-called big W wilderness, protected by federal law, including 77,000 acres I played a small part in protecting.



Moose on Mt. Moosilaukie in the White Mountains

There is a lot of wild in the White Mountains. Unlike wilderness areas in much of the rest of the nation, however, these are far from being untouched virgin, old-growth forests. In fact, most of the White Mountains were cut over by the timber barons of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Less than 100 years ago, these Wildernesses were devastatingly logged and, in many cases, burned. New Hampshire's Pemigewasset Wilderness still had logging railroads operating as recently as the 1940s.

But hundreds of thousands of acres devastated by human activity not much over a century ago are now vigorous, healthy ecosystems filled with crystal clear waters and

abundant wildlife. In New England, life has sprung anew from the wreckage of once-devastated forests.

Part of what these youthful wilderness areas signify is that much of this lovely Earth is more resilient than we sometimes fear.

Even in the face of death, life overcomes. Not without suffering, to be sure, and not unchanged, but these mountains, this Wilderness, are evidence that the power of Life is greater than the death caused by human hands.

I still worry about climate change and other massive ecological disruption humans are causing. But also, I rejoice in the abundant new growth in these White Mountains and have faith that, in the end, life will triumph.



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