

The Religious Campaign for Wilderness



The Spiritual Values of the Trap Hills Wild Area

**A Call to the People of God to
Preserve, Conserve and Restore this
Unique Portion of God's Good Earth,
based upon a Christian Reflection
by Local Michigan and Wisconsin
People on this Special Area**

October 20, 2004

Bergland, Michigan
September 30 - October 2, 2004

Trap Hills, Michigan Advisory Statement

Background

§0.1

During the Spring of 2004, the North Woods Wilderness Recovery Center, a coalition of environmental organizations headquartered in Marquette, Michigan, invited the Religious Campaign for Wilderness program to explore and identify the spiritual values of the Trap Hills area on the Ottawa National Forest of Michigan's Upper Peninsula.

§0.2

Representatives from Michigan and Wisconsin churches gathered in the Trap Hills during the weekend of September 30 through October 2, 2004. Amidst the lavish red, orange and golds of fall, church representatives visited this wild area, hiked its trails, spent time in prayer and reflection, and held discussions. Finally, on the basis of common insights gained from our experiences, we reached complete and unanimous agreement on a set of principles and insights regarding the spiritual values of this wild area.

§0.3

The findings from our group reflection follow below. Many additional insights did not fit into this abbreviated collection. You are invited to examine and comment upon these beginning insights. We encourage your feedback.

§0.4

This process of discerning the spiritual values of the Trap Hills has deepened us in our Christian walk. You may be surprised to learn how prayer and reflection when coupled with the presence of God in the wilderness produce a more vigorous form of discipleship, regardless of one's church or background. We invite you to "come and see."

§0.5

We also encourage you to enter into a prayerful and focused experience of wilderness so that together, we might join in a deeper appreciation of the benefits of wild areas for the enlargement of our faith. In this way we hope to better appreciate the path of our Lord who also benefitted from time in wilderness (Matt. 5:16).

§0.6

Signed

Fred Young
Marquette, Michigan

Thomas Herschelman,
Sheboygan Falls, Wisconsin

Trap Hills, Michigan Advisory Statement

Introduction

§1.0

“Thou shalt keep the commandments of the Lord, thy God, to walk in his ways, and fear him. For the Lord thy God brings you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths that spring out of valleys and hills...”

(Deuteronomy 8:6-8)

§1.1

The Scriptures are eloquent in their commentary on human responsibility to God for the care and keeping of creation. Despite this eloquence Christians have not always heard this teaching. The modern Church in particular has missed this message and its meaning for wilderness. One result is that contemporary Christians more often respond to cultural messages about wild lands than to the Biblical message (Genesis 2:15)

§1.2

The Bible is similarly clear on the ability of creation to reflect the Creator and provide spiritual instruction. Yet the evangelical witness of creation is more often ignored and disregarded than studied, taught and cherished (Psalm 8:1).

§1.3

This has not always been true. Wilderness in historic times often enjoyed special prominence. The Jews saw wild areas as places where they might connect to God. The Israelites during the Exodus were in the wilderness for forty years. Moses went to the top of a mountain to commune with God. The prophets were in the desert wilderness, not the town square.

§1.4

In the Christian era John the Baptist began his ministry in the desert. Jesus was forty days, not in the temple, but the wilderness. The Scriptures tell us that He often sought refuge in wilderness. The first monks went to wild places to better practice their faith. The saints speak eloquently of a blessedness to wild places.

§1.5

Despite this legacy, church members have forgotten the role which wilderness exercised in shaping their faith. Many otherwise faithful church members are untaught and unaware of how wilderness can help disciples grow spiritually.

§1.6

To address this failure a cross-section of Christian churches in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan gathered at the end of September and early October, 2004 to explore the spiritual lessons of

wilderness to our Christian faith.

§1.7

As we begin this articulation of our findings, we invite you to join with us as we explore this forgotten lore of our Church.

Wilderness: God's Silent Evangelical Witness in Creation

§2.1

During our sojourn in the Trap Hills, we have experienced that wilderness, when approached through prayer, reflection and thoughtful discussion, can open and provide inspiration and spiritual instruction. Our intent in this collection is to provide only those insights which are simple and clear.

§2.2

Wilderness is an intact, untrammled expression of God's creative action in the world. As we destroy wilderness, we also destroy a unique expression of the Creator's witness in the world. We would not eliminate pages of the Bible because other sections remain. Yet we blithely eliminate the evangelical witness of unique ecosystems which can never be replicated or replaced.

§2.3

We know that our ability to represent the great majesty and spiritual power which we have encountered in these North Woods is weak and feeble in comparison to creation's reflection of God's "eternal power and divine glory" (Romans 1:20) which we have encountered in and through the Trap Hills.

§2.4

Despite this feebleness, we submit the following beginning principles and observations for reflection and comments:

§2.5

The modern church must remember Scripture

The Bible presents an eloquent witness about the place of God's creation in the development of Christian faith. Many Christians however forget or miss this dimension of Holy Scripture. We forget too that humans are to care for the whole earth and keep it from harm.

§2.6

Humans are connected to the earth

We depend on the land for our nurture and sustenance. We are made in the image of God but also out of the dust of the earth. These twin facets of human creation must be integrated for a whole vision of our purpose and place in the world.

§2.7

Solitude is important for spiritual growth

The presence of natural beauty nurtures thoughts and aspirations which are not only beneficial for the individual, but which society can scarcely do without. When combined with solitude, wilderness becomes the cradle of inspiration which fortifies spiritual awareness and connectedness.

§2.8

Spiritual renewal can be found through wilderness

Religion is born in wilderness. In wilderness the Israelites found the wisdom of God and received His commandments. Through prayer and reflection in wilderness people even today are renewed in spiritual vigor and vision.

§2.9

Creativity is cultivated in wilderness

Amidst the stunning colors and the intricate relationships of insects and flowers, we witness the amazing designs of the Creator. In the garden of creation, we can be touched by God and inspired to imitate His creative handiwork.

§2.10

Reverence opens creation

Christians who seek God in wilderness often experience a vision of the sacredness of His life in nature. As we discern the worth of the Lord's wild creatures, reverence for life awakens. This helps us to handle and heal our own pains and suffering. Conversely, if one loses touch with nature, one can also lose touch with humanity.

§2.11

Humility is acquired

In nature we humans are not all-powerful. We see our limits transcended by the immensity of creation, and even the abilities of small animals. We become more open to God, His power and wisdom. In the grandeur of creation we are touched by God.

§2.12

Justice is taught through wild nature

A river of justice flows from God into the world. Every living thing is treated with an equanimity that challenges our sense of order. We need to be in tune with this order of justice as a blessing and model for human society.

§2.13

Interdependence and community flourish

A community of creatures nurtures human life. In wilderness humans are reminded of a “neighborhood” of plants and insects, birds and mammals, all of whom “clap their hands” in their unique songs of thanksgiving. This choir of unlettered praise helps us to give our own thanks to God for the blessings of life and sustenance.

§2.14

The mandate of stewardship

Humans are given dominion over creation and charged with stewardship of its bounty. Humans are uniquely blessed to alter the land. Without recall of the Lord’s commandments and sensitive stewardship, we can use the blessings of technology either to destroy the integrity of wild places or to serve and upbuild the world. We are therefore called to choose life, which means a responsible stewardship.

§2.15

Clear Vision

Wild places are obedient to their Creator. With reflection a natural order emerges that integrates its life into a divine harmony. This offers human society a vision of how to fit its social and economic systems together, and to integrate them into the larger order of creation.

§2.16

Wilderness as a Test

The integrity of wild lands speaks to human society and urges us into a parallel integrity for our roads, houses, commerce, worship and recreation. Wilderness epitomizes this integrity. The integrity of wilderness provides both a lesson and a test for human development and the appropriateness of our human constructions.

Principles for Reflection

§3.1

We have been touched by the Holy Spirit

After spending time amidst the pines and birches of the Trap Hills, we are amazed at the potential of the Holy Spirit to inspire and instruct us through wilderness in the further implications of our Christian faith. In the quiet of these hills, we have felt an amazing presence that has lifted us into many insights, only a few of which are listed here. From this uplifted and inspired experience, we invite you to consider the following recommendations which have become clear to us

§3.2

We need to change our thinking

As Isaiah tells us, “the ox knows his duty, but humans have forgotten their Lord.”

In wilderness we are convicted of arrogance and ignorance in the unjust designs of our society. In wilderness we hear the voice of the Lord through his works.

§3.3

Study the Scriptures about creation and wilderness

There is a nature trail through the Bible. From the first chapter of Genesis to the last chapter of Revelation, mandates about the care and keeping of creation fill the Scriptures. If we would observe this rich legacy, we would address many of the most pressing injustices in our social order as these are the result of a world out of balance with the principles of creation.

§3.4

We have a duty to leave the world in a better state

What is the effect of our life in this world? In wilderness we see that all things are passing. We are reminded to remember God, and to keep mindful the time of our own passing. In that time of accounting, how will we be judged? Will we have left the world a better place by our life in the world, or will it perhaps be a more degraded place? (Rev. 11:18).

A Call to the Churches of Michigan and Wisconsin

§4.1

Visit the Trap Hills

Come with a search for God and for spiritual inspiration and learning.
Come with an intentional seeking of the spiritual side to these hills.
Come with prayer and thanksgiving.

§4.2

Speak out on the spiritual values of wilderness

Religion has a long legacy of going into wilderness for spiritual reasons. Let us not ignore this dimension of the Biblical tradition, lest we impoverish the practice of our faith.

§4.3

Invite clergy to a discussion on the spiritual values of wilderness

What are these spiritual values? Why are they religiously significant?
What is their value for church congregations today? Let us save this special wild area while it is still pristine and able to be preserved for the future.

§4.4

Preserve the Native Tongue of Wilderness

We have too much tamed the land. The land does not need to fit the formal definitions of wilderness for it to behave as wilderness. The Upper Peninsula of Michigan has few good candidates for wilderness status, and the Trap Hills are one of the last best places remaining.

§4.5

Reflect on our responsibility to future generations

As we understand the spiritual and social benefits of wilderness, we should reflect especially at the need for protection of these Trap Hills.
Will our children's children thank us and bless us for how we have left the land, or will they curse our stupidity and selfishness in silencing its potential witness?
What do we owe the generations that will come after us?

§4.6

Circulate this statement

Please distribute these recommendations regarding Michigan's last best wild areas to your clergy and religious leaders. Every person owes thanks to God for the goodness of the world, and this thanks to God includes setting aside and saving of the last of the best for future generations.

§4.7

Know that the Trap Hills are unique

The Trap Hills represent an unduplicated wild area in this Great Lakes region.
Some of the most spectacular vistas in the Midwest are here, including cascading waterfalls,

remnants of the original forests, numerous trails, and a variety of rare and endangered plants and animals.

§4.8

Preserve and Protect the Trap Hills

As stewards of God's good earth, called to a holy dominion over field and forest, city and plain, we see a need to save these Trap Hills for posterity.

As disciples of Jesus Christ, we should join together and take action to preserve and protect this wild area.

Motivation and Conclusion

§5.1

The foregoing reflections and recommendations are but a small beginning, a scratching of the great wealth and riches which wilderness brings to our faith (religion) and our region.

§5.2

We come from many denominations and traditions. We are Baptists and Lutherans; Roman Catholics and Christian Reformed; Evangelicals, Methodists plus many other churches. Despite this diversity, we are unanimous in a conviction that wilderness provides an inspired witness that benefits all of our churches and all of our society.

§5.3

Therefore, we submit these recommendations to you, first that our religious traditions might be strengthened and reinvigorated to fulfill the biblical mandates to love God, to love our neighbor, and to care for the Lord's good earth, and second, that the small amount of wilderness which still remains in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan might be protected, preserved and enlarged.

§5.4

For all these reasons, we encourage every church into an advocacy of the potential for wilderness to offer a religious witness complementary to every manifestation of the Way and the Truth of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Closing Prayer

§6.1 Through our Father Creator, we have learned this week that we have a duty to preserve and expand the wilderness.

§6.2 We need wilderness as a place of learning, as a place where God's Book of Nature can teach us....

§6.3 Therefore we pray:

“Forgive us, God, for the ways we have offended you through the misuse of your good creation.

“Help us to a right relationship with your earth, and especially with those areas that still remain wild and free, where we can experience something of the world as you made it.

“Help us to imitate our Lord in His love. Our love and care for creation is an extension of God's love in creation.

“Through our connection to God, we are brought to thanksgiving, to joy, to tithing, to the redemption of our souls. These lead to respect, to reverence for life, and ultimately to the creation of new wilderness areas.

“Help us, O God, to fulfill these requirements for living rightly on your earth.

“Let this prayer spread that all people across this land might realize of the precious treasure that we have in preserved wilderness.”

Endorsements

§7.1

I have read the foregoing statement and wish to support its message and its call for Michigan to protect the Trap Hills wild area and its other remaining wilderness lands. This is our prayer.

§7.2

Signatures from Endorsees Please sign your full name, the church, synagogue or other institution

with which you are associated (for identification purposes), plus the town or city where you live.
Thank you.

§7.3 _____

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Please return completed petition forms to:
Mr. Tom Herschelman, W 3238 Woodland Road, Sheboygan Falls, WI 53085