



# The Religious Campaign for Wilderness

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Western North Carolina Advisory Statement

## The Spiritual Values of the Lost Cove-Harper Creek Wild Area

A Christian Reflection  
from an Exploration of a Proposed  
New Wilderness Area



Boone, North Carolina  
October 9-12, 2003

# Western North Carolina Advisory Statement

## Introduction

- §0.1 During the Spring of 2003, Appalachian Voices, a coalition of environmental organizations in Boone, North Carolina, invited the Opening the Book of Nature (OBN) Christian ministry to explore and identify the spiritual values of the Lost Cove - Harper Creek area of Western North Carolina.
- §0.2 To answer this invitation, representatives of the OBN program, together with representatives from North Carolina churches, gathered in the Lost Cove-Harper Creek area during the weekend of October 9-12, 2003. Amidst the lavish red, orange and gold colors of fall, we visited this wilderness area, hiked its trails, spent time in prayer and reflection, held discussions on our insights, and finally, on the basis of common insights regarding our experiences, we reached unanimous agreement on a beginning statement on the spiritual values and implications of this wilderness area.
- §0.3 The findings from our group reflection follow. You are invited to examine and comment upon our insights. We encourage your feedback.
- §0.4 You are especially invited to join with us on October 7-9, 2004, as we again enter into extended reflection on the spiritual values of the Lost Cove-Harper Creek area. As this process has deepened us in our Christian walk, so we invite you to “come and see.” Join us that weekend for a time of discussion and inspiration. You may be surprised to find how prayer and reflection when coupled with wilderness produce a more vigorous form of discipleship, regardless of one’s church or background.
- §0.5 With this background, we invite you to enter into this experience so that together, we might better appreciate the benefits of wild areas for the enlargement of our faith. At the same time we also hope to better appreciate the path of our Lord who benefitted from time in wilderness (Matt. 5:16).

§0.6 Signed by

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# Western North Carolina Advisory Statement

## The Spiritual Values of Wilderness

§1.0 As we have sought to discern the spiritual values of the Lost Cove-Harper Creek wild area, we have encountered so much inspiration and blessing that we are mentally and spiritually overwhelmed at how abundant is God's witness in creation when approached in a prayerful and reflective manner.

§1.1 The following are some of the beginning insights which our reflections and discussion have revealed:

### 1. Spiritual Revival is Inherent in Wilderness

§1.3 Wilderness has its own worship of the Creator.

By its very nature it offers a quiet but exuberant praise of God which humans should acknowledge. This natural worship gives wilderness inherent worth, presence and value that stretches beyond its potential monetary values as commodities or raw materials.

§1.4 When visitors to wilderness feel the presence of pines and plants, streams and rivers, earth and soil, sunlight and shadows, they connect to an aspect of the cosmos that elicits wonder, admiration and ultimately humility before the great work of our Creator-God.

§1.5 Millions of people visit wilderness places for hunting, fishing and recreation, but there is a more significant possibility, a re-creation, a spiritual renewal, which becomes possible when wilderness is entered for expressly religious purposes. Wilderness can then open and impart its unique teaching – a great uninhibited flow of spirit and life which nurtures and vivifies even our own lives, an inspired wisdom formed by the very process of creation. This enhances, even revives our sense of God who is everywhere present and fills all things.

§1.6 In this way we find in wild nature a reminder of God's presence within creation, a recollection of how the life in our own bodies is intertwined with the life of all other living things. As Christians, the Lord of this life is the Lord Jesus Christ through whom we find connection, even a unity, with the life of creation.

## 2. Teacher, Healer and Prophet

§2.1 Wilderness is an intact, untrammled expression of God's creative action. Thus it imparts aspects of His divine nature.

§2.2 Inherent in this nature are its derivative functions of teacher, healer and prophetic vision.

§2.3 As teacher, wilderness is inspiring, beautiful and manifesting of wisdom; it is also stern, just and uncompromising.

§2.4 As flowers are obedient to their natures, so wilderness everywhere teaches obedience to its Maker and each part demonstrates fidelity to its purpose. This is a lesson which human society has not yet learned.

§2.5 As healer, wilderness is recreative, regenerative and spiritually uplifting when approached with respect, reverence and a search for God. Every one of us needs healing.

§2.6 When the therapeutic values of wild nature are understood, wilderness becomes medicine for wounded souls and stressed minds, a prescription written by the wisdom of our Maker for the strains and tensions of modern life.

§2.7 As prophetic vision, wilderness reveals the eternal power and divine nature of the Creator. At the same time it models the integrity and harmony of the created order as a witness for human society.

§2.8 Experience in wilderness encourages us to leave the profit motive and return to the prophet mode. The more we intuit its prophetic nature, the more we also develop humility and gratefulness.

§2.9 Therefore we see the witness of wilderness as a great prophetic lesson for human society: its display of submission to divine principle and the integration of its designs into the biophysical systems of the planet provide a test for the suitability, sustainability and integrity of human action. The prophetic lesson is that human actions and development must enhance and complement the already existing systems of nature or they should not be carried out. This witness of wilderness offers guidance for human actions and ensures that a complementary, integrative quality informs all human development and growth.

§2.10 Despite all of these magnificent features and miraculous functions, wilderness is still fragile and vulnerable. It requires love and intentional care to preserve and protect it as well as recognition that it can be wounded and even destroyed by careless or thoughtless human action.

### 3. A Geography of Hope

§3.1 Wilderness is a revelation of the Logos. Wilderness is also a visible system of spirit and life, designed by the creative wisdom of God. This “witness of the cosmos” gives us an ability to face our own mortality and to shape our own lives with consideration of their consequences upon the future.

§3.2 Wilderness imbues us with a sense of the virtues, evoking faith, hope and charity and the righteousness which we repeatedly learn from Scripture as well as from our own inner life.

§3.3 Wilderness provides a framework for faith. It makes the presence of God more palpable and so affirms a sense of His nearness. Just as Jesus often withdrew into the wilderness to pray (Luke 5:16), so all Christians can benefit from following this blessed example. Our own prayers find a particularly unimpeded connection to God in wilderness.

§3.4 The very existence of wild lands reminds us that the world yet retains vestiges of its primeval purity. This beckons us into our own forms of purity in imitation of the image and likeness in which we have been created. In this way the existence of wilderness can serve as “a geography of hope,” even a beacon for the possibility of purity.

§3.5 Wilderness hides her lessons from anger or greed or prideful disdain, but she reveals them to those who love God and who are willing to love what He has created. Wilderness thus elicits a natural form of charity; she encourages an opening of the heart and mind in vulnerability to our Lord and Saviour that He might impart the deeper glories of His majesty while we are yet immersed in our worldly sojourn.

§3.6 Faith, hope and charity, therefore, are among the many witnesses of wilderness. When these virtues are set alongside the thanksgiving, humility and submission of our lives as disciples of Christ, we can relearn an old lesson which Early Christians knew well: that wilderness becomes “a geography of virtue,” a form of religious teaching which deepens our discipleship.

## 4. Wilderness as Tithe

§4.1 Creation is the context of our lives and the framework for our journey of discipleship. It is a gift from God that He has given to us to steward and to have dominion over in a way that requires justice, prudence, temperance and holiness.

§4.2 Yet wilderness is fast disappearing. Less than 0.3% of North Carolina's once magnificent forests and mountains has been set aside for future generations to experience and enjoy. If we are to rightly steward and take dominion over this land, if we are to leave creation's full evangelical witness intact for the future, wilderness must be a continuing legacy which we will pass on to future generations so that they, too, may benefit from the natural lessons of our Creator without defilement or without elements missing from its grand and eloquent commentary.

§4.3 Wilderness has unseen dimensions.

Just as plants have roots which are underground, so there is more to the unseen in wilderness than to the seen. Wilderness is an untainted embodiment of the essential mystery of being; it reflects the timelessness of its Creator and the depth of its Maker. Wilderness may even hold answers to questions we have not yet learned to ask. To degrade or destroy it before it can impart the witness of its Unseen Maker is irresponsible and the height of folly.

§4.4 We are inspired, therefore, to invite the churches of North Carolina to reflect on wilderness as a social tithe, as a setting aside of the first and best of what ultimately belongs to God. In this way, future generations may also enjoy the beauty and good in God's undefiled creation. From a religious perspective, wilderness protection becomes a free will donation that we owe to God in thanksgiving for His many blessings in our lives and upon our planet.

§4.5 Wilderness is also our religious acknowledgment of a responsibility to leave some of the best of the land intact so that future generations may experience the world of their forefathers as it was originally created by God.

§4.6 For these reasons, and more not listed here, we ask you, as representatives of Christ's continuing ministry, to consider the following recommendations:

## Recommendations

§5.1 After spending time in the Lost Cove-Harper Creek wilderness and arriving at the insights which we list above, plus many other insights not listed here, we invite you to consider the following recommendations:

§5.2 ◆ Visit the Lost Cove-Harper Creek area.

Come with an intentional seeking of its spiritual side. Come with a search for God and for spiritual learning. Come with prayer and thanksgiving.

§5.3 ◆ 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.

§5.4 ◆ Take action to preserve and protect this wild area.

North Carolina has few top quality candidates for wilderness status, and the Lost Cove-Harper Creek area is one of the last best places remaining.

§5.5 ◆ Invite churches and clergy into a discussion on the spiritual values of wilderness.

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

§5.6 ◆ Reflect on our responsibility to future generations.

Look especially at the need for wilderness protection. 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?

§5.7 ◆ Join us for a time of personal reflection and discussion.

On the weekend of October 7-9, 2004, we will again hold an exploration of the spiritual values of wilderness. At that time we hope to finalize a declaration for western North Carolina's churches on the spiritual values of the Lost Cove-Harper Creek proposed wilderness area.

§5.8 Please distribute these recommendations regarding North Carolina's last best wild areas to your clergy and religious leaders. Every person owes a thanks to God for the goodness of the world, and this includes saving of the last of the best for future generations. Thank you.

## Motivation and Conclusion

- §6.1 The foregoing reflections and recommendations are but a small beginning, a scratching of the great wealth and riches which wilderness brings to our faith and our nation.
- §6.2 We come from many denominations and traditions. We are Baptists and Anabaptists; Presbyterians and Pentecostals; Catholics and Evangelicals; Methodists and Episcopalians; Seventh-Day Adventists, Eastern Orthodox, and Lutherans. Despite our theological diversity, we are unanimous in a conviction that creation provides an inspired witness that benefits all of our churches and all of our society.
- §6.3 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 North Carolina might be protected, preserved and enlarged.
- §6.4 For all these reasons, we encourage every church into a deeper examination 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.



# North Carolina Advisory Statement on Lost Cove-Harper Creek Proposed Wilderness Area

## Endorsements

§7.1 Signatures from Endorsees

§7.2 I have read the foregoing statement and wish to support its message and the call for North Carolina to protect the Lost Cove-Harper Creek wild area and its other remaining wilderness lands. This is our prayer.

§7.3 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.

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