

Wilderness to Wilderness

Project Overview:

Wilderness to Wilderness aims to communicate the expansiveness and wildness of Montana by visually connecting all thirteen mountain Wilderness Areas¹ through a series of high resolution images in which each Wilderness Area is visible from the next. The visual connections made between Wilderness Areas is intended to inspire curiosity, cultivate respect and encourage questions from the viewer. Through the creation of a set of images in which a visual line can be drawn from the first Wilderness to the last, the viewer will be transported across Montana's wildest lands.

To a landscape photographer, elements of the landscape - rocks, trees, flowers, mountains, sky, etc. - are fixed puzzle pieces awaiting assembly. The photographer's task is to select angles and lighting conditions that put those pieces together in a way that brings the landscape to life. A successful landscape image stimulates the mind's eye, awakening the viewer to the wholeness of the landscape, all puzzle pieces in place.

If each image is a puzzle unto itself, seamlessly integrating the physical components of the landscape, *Wilderness to Wilderness* is a massive puzzle which unites these images, infilling the geography of the mind while developing a mental map of our wildest places. Through the articulation of Montana's Wilderness Areas as a visually connected collection, viewers will be prompted to consider: is the puzzle complete? What are the missing pieces? Do our Wilderness Areas offer sufficient connectivity for wildlife and adequate space for people to roam freely?

Process:

Beginning on the crest of the Cabinet Mountains Wilderness, an image will be composed featuring distinctive foreground elements. Ninety miles distant, subalpine peaks of the Great Burn Recommended Wilderness will be legible in the background (see attachment 'Exhibition Design,' page 1). The next image will be captured on a peak featured in the background of the Cabinet Mountains Wilderness image. From that vantage point, now in the Great Burn Recommended Wilderness, another image will be made in the same style - distinctive foreground elements with distant peaks - this time featuring the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness on the horizon. And so it continues:

- Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness to Welcome Creek Wilderness;
- Welcome Creek Wilderness to Rattlesnake Wilderness;
- Rattlesnake Wilderness to Mission Mountain Tribal Wilderness;

¹ This project excludes wildlife refuge Wilderness Areas (UL Bend, Medicine Lake and Red Rocks Lakes). These spaces are vital and will be referenced in the final exhibition, but lack the verticality to follow the mountain-to-mountain pattern of the project. Several recommended Wilderness Areas and Wilderness Study Areas will be included.

- Mission Mountain Tribal Wilderness to Mission Mountain Wilderness;
- Mission Mountain Wilderness to Great Bear Wilderness;
- Great Bear Wilderness to Bob Marshall Wilderness;
- Bob Marshall Wilderness to Scapegoat Wilderness;
- Scapegoat Wilderness to Anaconda-Pintler Wilderness;
- Anaconda-Pintler Wilderness to Gates of the Mountains Wilderness;
- Gates of the Mountains Wilderness to Lee Metcalf Wilderness;
- Lee Metcalf Wilderness to Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness.

The ordering of the above connections from Wilderness to Wilderness is based upon in-person reconnaissance and careful mapping. Where impediments are found, such as non-Wilderness obscuring the view to the next Wilderness Area, an interim image will be captured at an intermediate point between Wilderness Areas. As disruptive as it may be to the aesthetic of the project, it will ultimately prove illustrative, serving as a visual example of habitat fragmentation and the potential for Wilderness Study Areas to connect our wildest places.

In addition to the above images, hereby referred to as ‘Headlining Images’, a series of photographs will be made within each Wilderness Area featuring the unique ecology and geology of the space.

Project deliverables:

Ultimately, the deliverables of *Wilderness to Wilderness* will have three distinct components: touring exhibition, coffee table book and online exhibit.

Touring exhibition (see attachment ‘Exhibition Design,’ pages 2-4):

The power of this project lies in its primary output: an exhibition comprised of visually immersive kiosks. In addition to intro and outro kiosks, each Wilderness Area will be featured as a kiosk with the following components:

- 48”x72” Headlining Image;
- 3-5 additional supporting images;
- Captions describing unique ecological and geological characteristics featured in the images; and
- A large wall map showcasing the relative location of that Wilderness Area to the next Headliner Image Wilderness, which will be visible through a carefully constructed gap in the kiosk.

The *Wilderness to Wilderness* touring exhibition will host free viewings in communities across Montana. The tour will leverage local and statewide conservation agencies as hosts, providing the opportunity for those organizations to table and share local conservation work.

Timeline: Spring 2028-Spring 2029

Coffee table book:

As a coffee table book, *Wilderness to Wilderness* will be designed to visually communicate the experience of moving from space to space. Each Wilderness Area chapter will begin with a short essay interspersed with supplementary images and maps that further illustrate the connection to the next Wilderness, concluding with the headliner image from which the next chapter's Wilderness is visible.

The exact quantity and distribution of the book will be determined by market viability and will be self-published to ensure control over the production process. Built into the sale of the book will be a number of books set aside for strategic gifting to conservation organizations and policy makers. The release of a coffee table book will align with the opening of the exhibition.

Timeline: Spring 2028

Online exhibit:

An interactive online exhibit will be made for those that are unable to view the exhibition in person. The standalone website will include an immersive *Wilderness to Wilderness* experience, mirroring the style of the in-person exhibition with a virtual gallery that leads viewers through the experience of traveling from Wilderness to Wilderness. Additionally, the website will feature opportunities for viewers to engage with and advocate for Roadless Area conservation initiatives.

Timeline: Spring 2028 and on...

Timeline:

The image gathering phase will be conducted on foot via strategic backpacking trips without the usage of drones. One to two weeks will be dedicated to each Wilderness Area. This time will include reconnaissance, waiting for weather windows, capturing supporting *Wilderness to Wilderness* images and ultimately the capture of the Headlining Image.

The first series of backpacking trips will take place in 2026 between June and November. The remaining Wilderness Areas will be photographed in 2027. The exact completion date of the project is difficult to predict as success hinges on relatively clean atmosphere to create the *Wilderness to Wilderness* images. The hazy air of summer's stagnant high pressure systems and wildfire smoke are the primary variables that will affect the project's pacing. The capture phase of this project is expected to take 4-5 months of field time over a 16-month period (June 2026 - November 2027).

Project legacy:

It is the hope that the visual impact of the touring exhibition, coffee table book and online exhibit will leave viewers inspired to further explore their relationship to Wilderness while considering the limited nature of our wildest lands.

This project is designed to live well beyond its public rollout phase. The images and book created by the project will be made available to conservation organizations and policy makers advancing Wilderness values in their work. In five years' time, the project is expected to reach tens of thousands of Montanans, who, using their own unique talents within their communities, may share the ecological and cultural value of Wilderness within their spheres of influence.

Additionally, *Wilderness to Wilderness* seeks to stimulate legislative inquiry by policy makers regarding Roadless Areas that lack Wilderness designation. Legislators will be invited to the touring exhibit and a set of books will be set aside for strategic distribution to legislators.

The book and prints from the project will persist into the next century with the hope of inspiring future generations of Montanans to carry the mantle of Wilderness conservation in Montana.

Project funding:

The backing of the Matthew Hansen Endowment, financially and in spirit, is critical to the launch of *Wilderness to Wilderness*. This project exists at the intersection of adventure and advocacy. The project, itself an adventure, will be a call to action for viewers to seek their own Wilderness experiences while considering the impact of shrinking public lands on pristine habitat and the human psyche.

Funds will be used to support the field time required to create *Wilderness to Wilderness*, capturing the images and stories necessary to create the exhibition, book and website. Specifically, the funds will be used to cover the gas, food, equipment and research required for the creation phase of this project. Additionally, funds will be used to launch the *Wilderness to Wilderness* website which will feature a blog documenting the process of capturing and making the Wilderness to Wilderness deliverables.

Additional funding will be sought to complete the rollout phase of the project. The remainder of the project will aim to be funded as follows:

- Touring exhibition: funded by grants and private donations
- Coffee table book publication: crowd-sourced
- Online exhibit: private donations