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Wilderness Journals: Wandering the High Lonesome

Jack Ward Thomas

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Wilderness is smooth sippin'-whiskey for the outdoorsman's soul. But it's also espresso for those determined to keep America's wildest places untrammeled by man.

For Jack Ward Thomas, it was both.

Wilderness Journals tells the story of how Thomas came to know the “high lonesome” and how his experiences packing into rough country with fine horses and good friends would fuel his passion and vision as chief of the U.S. Forest Service.

A true journal-style memoir, Thomas describes adventures along the trail, including encounters with bold bears, reclusive war veterans, and vast expanses of the West that only the heartiest explorers ever see. He writes about the wildlife, forests, meadows, and mountains with two voices. One is the voice of an emerging conservation leader looking into the future of natural resource management. The other is the voice of a backcountry horseman simply doing what he loves.

When Thomas moved to Oregon in 1973 to begin work as a research biologist, he found a mentor and enduring friend in Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife regional director Bill Brown. It was a camaraderie that changed Thomas's life and career. Together, the two embarked on a decades-long odyssey of wild-country experiences that would galvanize Thomas's will to beat back the exploiters who gaze upon America's wildernesses and see only dollar signs.

An appendix in *Wilderness Journals* includes specific examples. During his tenure as Forest Service chief, which began in 1993, Thomas intended to enhance and expand America's wilderness system. But changing the status quo comes hard for a federal agency. In revealing commentary, Thomas probes behind-the-scenes political struggles, internal resistance, final analyses of his defeats?as well as his hopes for the future.

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