

olympic national forest

# what is WILDERNESS

*Wilderness is Water*

*It is ubiquitous, easy to be taken for granted. Its abundance accounts for our area's beautiful, lush, and mysterious setting and allows life to thrive. How does wilderness preserve this resource when it appears boundless?*



Wilderness provides a variety of human health benefits to those who choose to recreate within its boundaries. It offers a physical test for the adventurer, a place for mental renewal, and a refuge to enjoy the spiritual health benefits one derives from feeling close to nature. However, arguably the most important human health benefit of wilderness flows beyond wilderness boundaries to the services of those who may never step foot in wilderness. Clean water produced by pristine Olympic Peninsula wilderness ecosystems provides the region with some of the cleanest water in the world.

Water gives life to everything and it is abundant within our temperate rainforests. Our intact Olympic Peninsula wilderness areas, untrammled by man, are free to perform their natural life-giving processes. The lack of roads, impervious surfaces, and agricultural runoff within these places allow our lakes, rivers, and streams to circulate water free of pollution. Experiencing the benefits of these processes is as easy as drinking your tap water.

*A creek crashes through the wilderness*

Water undergoes a natural hydrologic filtration process, within wilderness areas; the water is clean because it flows through a pristine source. This process is so effective that the city of Port Townsend and its surrounding areas have not filtered their drinking water for 86 years. Their water comes from the Big Quilcene and Little Quilcene rivers, which originate in the Buckhorn Wilderness. State health regulations recently tightened and the City has decided to add a filtration facility. In the meantime, the water remains primarily wilderness-treated rather than human-treated. The city continues to disinfect the water with chlorine, one of the minimum treatments permitted under past regulations.



*From the wilderness to your tap*



for the greatest good

What happens to clean water after it **flows out of the wilderness**? If downstream watersheds aren't cared for, it's possible to lose the great benefits of pristine wilderness watersheds from the **impacts of pollution and runoff**. In addition to its use for human consumption, clean water also benefits fish hatcheries and provides a healthy habitat for shellfish beds. Michael Spears, a water resources specialist for the City of Port Townsend says,



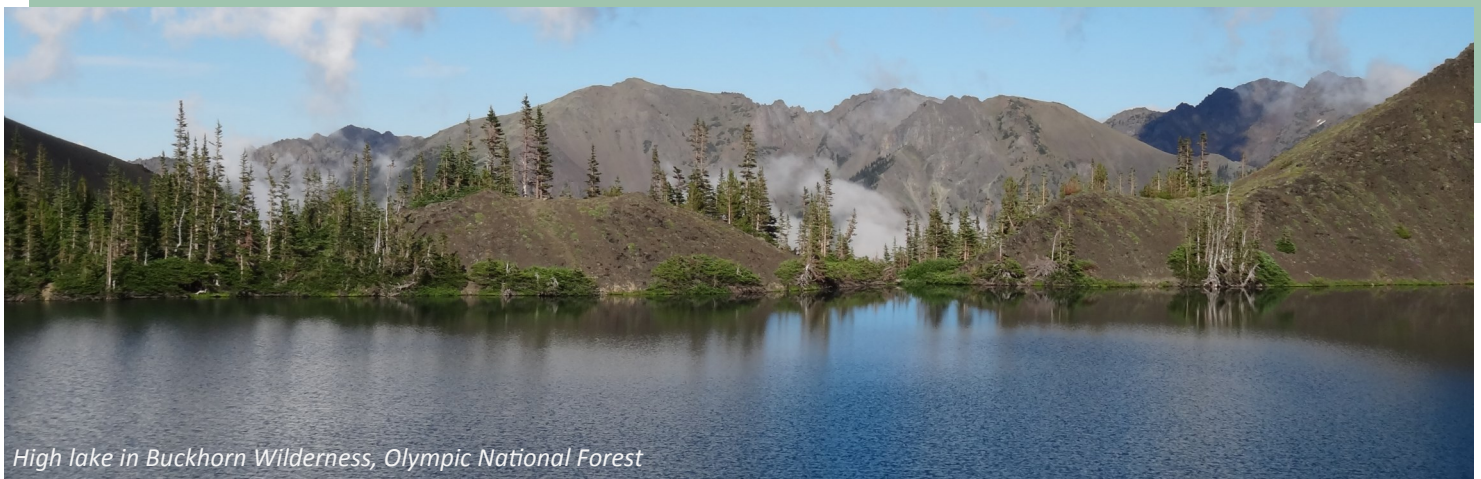
*Frosty morning on an Olympic lake*

*“We’ve got great tasting water,*

*and it’s because we’ve got a great source. We need to protect the source.”*

The Olympic National Forest collaborates with landowners and stakeholders in the Sequim area to ensure water from the Dungeness River watershed, which flows from wilderness, remains clean and usable for Sequim residents. This type of planning allows the watershed to serve many purposes such as supporting agricultural needs, providing clean drinking water, and maintaining ecosystem integrity.

The Wilderness Act is a document born out of foresight, and the presence of wilderness areas continue to respond to our societal challenges. On a broad scale, unchecked development, pollution and non-sustainable agriculture continue to create drinking water shortages around the world. On a local scale, Seattle was recently declared the nation’s fastest growing city. What will this mean for our region in terms of ecological health? **It is for these reasons that America established the Wilderness Act**; to combat the uncontrollable forces of development and progress, to leave humans a physical, mental and spiritual place of refuge, and to protect our most valuable commodity: **water**.



*High lake in Buckhorn Wilderness, Olympic National Forest*

**C**lean flowing water is a finite resource, one on which we depend so greatly. The benefits of Wilderness tumble through canyons, flow through woods and fields, and fall from your tap. Even if your path never takes you into the Wilderness, you still have enjoyed its richness, sipped from a glass.



-Alex Weinberg, Recreation Specialist, Olympic National Forest  
Lisa Romano, Public Affairs Officer, Olympic National Forest