

~EARTHBOUND~PRODUCTIONS~

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*The intent of the Procession is to elevate the dignity of the human spirit
by enhancing the cultural exchange that we have with each other and with the natural world
and to do so through imagination, creation, and sharing.*

Earth Day
April 22, 2014

Good afternoon, and thank you
Commissioners Cathy Wolfe, Sandra Romero, and Karen Valenzuela
for this honor of receiving the 2014 Thurston County Earth Day Proclamation.

2014 marks the 20th season of the Procession of the Species Celebration. It is also the 50th anniversary of the Wilderness Act, which established the National Wilderness Preservation System and set aside an initial 9.1 million acres of wildlands for the use and benefit of all American people.

The Wilderness Act was a promise made to the future of this nation by a citizenry who had learned firsthand what was at stake through their witness of destruction and loss of life in World War II, the Korean War and the emerging war in Vietnam. This was a time when our country wrestled with who we said we were, and how we said we would be. Not just the notion, but the act of civil rights efforts were emerging on all fronts.

Throughout our country, lands were polluted, our rivers were on fire, pesticide use was rampant: it was Rachel Carson's "silent spring."

As the debate over our national identity continued to escalate, our questions naturally turned to the future: Who did we want to be as a people? Who did we hope our children would become?

One essential way into answering these questions was through the preservation of wilderness. Howard Zahniser, who first drafted the Wilderness Act, said this about wilderness:

I believe that in the present phase of our civilization we have a profound need for wilderness - a need that is not only recreational and spiritual but also educational and scientific, and essential to a true understanding of ourselves, our culture, our own natures, and our place in **all** nature.

The promise of the Wilderness Act was perhaps best articulated by one of our own Washington heroes, Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas, from Yakima. He proposed that the United States adopt a Wilderness Bill of Rights. Listen to these elements of promise:

Creating cultural connections between communities and the natural world

We believe in the right of children to an understanding of their place in nature's community of which they are a part.

We believe in their right to acquire skills for living in the out-of-doors as part of their heritage, to swim, to fish, to manage a canoe, to climb, to hike.

We believe in their right – and in our right – to discovery and adventure in nature's world.

We believe in the right to friendly comradeship with someone older, likewise an adventurer in the out-of-doors.

We believe in the right to the healing found in the wilderness of nature.

We believe in the unfolding response to the warm earth, the friendly stars, the music of streams, the unknown life in the hidden places, great trees, sunsets, and storms.

The Procession of the Species Celebration is born out of this lineage of promise.

In 1995, on the cusp of the new millennium, the organizers of the Procession made a forward commitment for this program to last for one generation – 20 years. By engaging the languages of art, music, and dance, the Procession refreshes our understandings about why the natural world matters to us as a society. Designed as a cultural exchange rather than an entertainment event, the Procession affirms the promise of the Wilderness Act and carries it forward.

Eco-philosopher Joanna Macy captures today what inspired people in the decades before us to make such promises as those held in the Wilderness Act, the Endangered Species Act, the Clean Water Act, and the Clean Air Act. She says:

If you want an adventure, what a time to be alive! Don't waste time in self-pity over darkness. Don't wish for better circumstances. You're born into **this**, and you're here to love it, to see that it goes on.

Such is the ardent encouragement within the promise of the Wilderness Act.
Such is the community act of this celebration we call Procession.

As the Commissioners of Thurston County, I thank you for all that you are doing to carry the promise of the Wilderness Act forward and for all that you are doing to protect the natural habitat of our region to the benefit of all of its residents.

And on behalf of all involved in the presentation of the Procession of the Species Celebration, please know that we are grateful for, and honored by, your recognition.

Eli Sterling
Founding Director
Earthbound Productions, Procession of the Species Celebration

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Howard Zahniser, "The Need for Wilderness Areas." In *The Living Wilderness*, Number 59, winter-spring, 1956-57.

William O. Douglas, *A Wilderness Bill of Rights*. Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1965.

Joanna Macy, in the documentary film, *The Wisdom to Survive: Climate Change, Capitalism & Community*. Old Dog Documentaries, 2013