

**Robert Redford**  
**Actor, Director, Environmentalist**

Interviewer--John Howe

Wallace Stegner talks about the valley of wilderness, and a concept he called the geography of hope. Why is wilderness preservation important to this country?

Robert Redford

Well I think Wallace Stegner, first of all, was probably the greatest voice among many great voices to speak about the west, because he did it as a poet, and he did it with the knowledge of the area. I mean the fact that he, he really spent his young life in around the Salt Lake area, so he had a very good fix on Utah and it's assets, but the way he spoke about it put it into almost a magical realm, and I think that the beauty of wilderness is so powerful when left alone that it does go into that new realm of magic. I mean particularly when you weigh it against development and what development looks like in this country, even though it's brought benefits to people economically. The fact is if you weigh a developed area against a natural area, there is no comparison, and there's been no greater voice for that than Wallace Stegner. I think he saw the wilderness and preservation of the wilderness, and I agree with this, as the reason to preserve it because it told us who we are as a people, and as a nation. Its symbol reflected who we like to think of ourselves as a people, and as a nation. I agree with that.

Interviewer--John Howe

This film includes the leaders of the environmental movement, such as Teddy Roosevelt, Wallace Stegner, Bruce Babbitt, David Brower, Martin Litton, Edward Abbey and Stewart Hill. What has their contributions and legacies meant to the future of wilderness?

Robert Redford

I think the contribution these men have made, and I'm friends with most of them, is first of all, they had respect for the natural environment, and the respect that they had was an earned respect-they lived it, they traveled it, they camped it, they hiked it. So they knew what they were talking about, but they also had a long view of the value of the natural environment, knowing that if development went out of control or stayed rampant and out of control for too long that we would eventually wipe away something important about ourselves, and that's what I think they understood.

Interviewer--John Howe

Some Utah politicians have been among the most vocal against wilderness legislation coming from other states. Some anti-wilderness protests have centered on what they view as infringements on their freedom, what should be the response to that?

Robert Redford

My response to that way of thinking is that they should come into the twenty first century. They're speaking about yesterday; they're speaking about a time when there was something called manifest destiny, when the west was wide open for the taking. Those

days are gone, and what was the west isn't any longer. There's not a whole lot left that we can call the west as we once knew it, what we like to think of ourselves as being proud of, doesn't exist so much anymore. I think that way of thinking is old fashioned, and it belongs to a different time past, not where we are now or where we need to go in the future.

Interviewer--John Howe

Secretary of the Interior, Ken Salazar halted potential oil and gas leases calling for more state. Tim DeChristopher's a University of Utah student, he bid on oil and gas leases hoping to prevent their development. His view is that the environmental community has been too passive. Please discuss this situation as to what do you think about the oil and gas leases? What do you think about the Tim DeChristopher case, specifically?

Robert Redford

Well, I think first of all, he represents the voice of a young person, which I think is wonderful because I think young people are going to inherit what we've done with this land, or what we haven't done. So I got a kick out of that, I thought that was pretty great. As far as the oil and gas leases are concerned, all that is tied to a non-renewable energy source which eventually is going to go out. Ok, well I understand that we're a development oriented society. For me, it's always been a question of what we were going to develop for our survival, considering that's what we were as a country, but also what we were going to preserve for our survival. That, to me, is where the long view comes in, and I think this way of thinking about oil and gas leases trying to put them on public lands that belong to the public, they don't belong to energy corporations, they don't belong to people in congress either, they don't belong to legislatures. They belong to the public, and they should be preserved for the public. So putting them either in wilderness areas, or near parks-near national parks, is for me a disgrace, and it shouldn't happen, and doesn't need to happen. It's not necessary to happen despite all the propaganda that they will give you about economic development, how it's going to put bread on the table and so forth. There's much of that argument that's really bogus when you look at the big picture. There's places for them to do that, not in the natural areas of wilderness or national parks or national monuments.

Interviewer--John Howe

You've spoken about a sense of community, and a return to western lifestyles in rural communities. How do ranchers in small towns depended on energy production survive in these turbulent economic times?

Robert Redford

Well, I think, you know, there's certain ways that we can go back in time. I'm critical of political thinking that's back in time, and isn't in accordance with where we are in the world, but I do think some of the solutions can be found in our past; because technology and corporate control, and the relationship between technology and corporate control and politics has created a lot of danger signs, and so therefore I think that if we go back and to look as to how ranchers and farmers lived when they had to live this way, where they grew the food that they ate, and they used the land that needed to be used, they didn't

place buildings, and highways on land that didn't need it. We should go back to that, we should go back to more of a community neighborhood kind of living, and they bartered with each other. When I first came here to Sundance, for example-that was back in 1960-61, much of Utah and the rural areas still existed on kind of the barter system. I know it did here. When I bought the land from the Stewart family, there was much of the land when there was some parcels that had been given over for people to build cabins on, it was because look you can build a cabin on a little piece of my property if you give me milk for the year, you know. You give me your dairy product, you give me your beef product, you give me your tire product, you know, and I'll give you a piece of land. It was trade. I think some of that could come back, but the main thing is that I think ranchers and farmers should be more concerned about their resources-the resources that are there. I would back away from corporations and high tech companies that want to come in and take massive parts of the land for either second home development, for real estate, for that kind of money or to put giant like Monsanto companies like that, put these gigantic corporate footprints on the landscape. I would back away from that, I would get much more to the actual growing of food that you can eat. There is a lot of questions about obesity, and infectious diseases on Native American lands. Well, if you look at the history you see a lot of very thin people, because they worked the land and they ate the food that they worked. You know, they walked, they worked, they moved, and now not so much of that. So, I think a certain return to the way we used to farm and ranch is a healthy thing.

Interviewer--John Howe

One climatologist we spoke to describe the American West as the epicenter of global warming, with warming occurring much more rapidly here than other areas. How important is this concern, do you think, and specifically water issues like those of the Colorado River?

Robert Redford

Well look, I mean the fact of the matter is it's a huge issue. Global warming has, despite the more traditional views that don't want to accept change, change is on us whether we like it or not, and it's clear. Yeah, I don't think it can be denied. You can't say science is junk, it's here, and so therefore the Colorado River doesn't make it to its end anymore, nor does the Sacramento, the flow is down fifty percent on all these rivers and some of them don't even make it to their destination anymore. Look what's happened to salmon, because why? We built too many dams, and so water is a huge issue because it's a reflection of global warming in the west. What greater demonstration project than the west to exhibit what global warming is doing to us, because development-so many golf courses, I love golf, I play golf, but there're too many, and it takes up too much water. There are too many dams, you should take dams out, let the water flow naturally the way it used to. If something isn't done pretty quick that takes us back to where we were in a more natural state, then we're going to have a really serious problem, we've already got a problem, which we can see. Water is a huge problem, because it's a reflection of global warming and out of control development, and that has to be brought back into order, I think.

Interviewer--John Howe

The creation of the Grand Staircase Escalante National Monument by President Clinton and his Secretary of Interior, Bruce Babbitt, provoked controversy in some rural communities. Was it the right thing to do, and why?

Robert Redford

Well, I think, first of all yes, I think it was the right thing to do, because I think somebody has to step up and protect some of these areas. Particularly in an area where I think the current legislature sees it as, you know, whether it's something incredible like the Grand Canyon-to do slant drilling in the Grand Canyon-that's insane. Some of these areas need to be protected by somebody. Clinton, first of all the past administrations were I think a disgrace to the environment, I think that's pretty clear. They saw the environment as something to be wiped out, and that was the greatest disservice and disrespect they could do to the American people-particularly new generations of young people. So when Clinton came in he was unknowledgeable about the environment, but he came around, and he did so with the Escalante Staircase. However, I think politically, he went about it in probably not the most diplomatic way, he didn't include the local politicians, and they balked, and I understand that. But to punish the situation by building roads all through that-that's kind of very small thinking, that's sort of immature, but however I think it wasn't done the best way it could be done, but I think I agree with it being done. As far as Salazar's concerned, I think Salazar just represents hope, and sensibility against that disgraced attitude about the environment that existed particularly in the last eight years.

Interviewer--John Howe

Wilderness areas from the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to the deserts of Southern Utah see increasing threats. Much of the debate seems to be about competing values regarding economic gain versus wilderness preservation. Is it possible to balance competing interests, and what should be done?

Robert Redford

I think the greatest argument to be foisted now, or to be dealt with right now, is an argument that's been there since I became active in the environment, and that is it goes back to what are we going to preserve, and what are we going to develop, considering we are development oriented society. You're probably not going to take that away, but the question is what are you going to have left to develop if you don't preserve something, and also what are you going to preserve for the dignity and the stature of your country in terms of it's heritage? Is the west going to be reduced to just photos and films to show young people how it used to be, or are there going to be places where they can go and see the way it used to be, like wilderness and like national parks. So, I think this whole argument about economics versus preservation has to be taken away because that's old fashioned thinking. I think modern thinking, and thinking that's going to take us into a more sustainable future has to be thinking that is going to figure out ways to balance both, and I believe in balancing both. It can't be one or the other; it has to be a balance of both. The problem is, particularly with the last administration, was disgraceful on many levels, but the one of the horrible ones is they had no interest in preservation. It was all about development, therefore it almost seemed un-American. How can you take

American assets that we're so proud of, you go around the world and you see the Himalayas, you see all these great places, and here we have the American West, and we should be proud of it, and we are proud of it. We use it in slogans, we use it in songs, even politicians boast about the great trademarks of the American West, and yet politically they're taking it away, it doesn't make any sense.

Interviewer--John Howe

There's a discussion of de-listing wolves and grizzly bears from the endangered species list, wild horses are consistently removed from the public range by the Bureau of Land Management. Can the wildlife of the west survive these increasing threats to their travel corridors, and what do you think should be done there?

Robert Redford

Well, I think a lot of the policies are determined by the administration that these departments live in. For example, the Bureau of Land Management, depending on what administration is in place, and what its policies are, what its thinking is, is going to be reflected in the agencies. So, the BLM in the last several years has been pretty pathetic, if it's there to protect public lands it's done a pretty lousy job of it. Why? Because it was directed from the top, not-I think that corridors should be protected, I think that migration should be protected, I think that wolves should be protected. There will be a level reached where wolves overpopulate, there'd be ways to bring that back into balance, but to take them, but if they're endangered then they should be put on the list, because there has to be some sustainability because wildlife includes not only ecosystem-ecosystem includes animals, and if we don't recognize the relationship between animals and the ecosystem that they live in, which feeds us, then we're really destroying our own ability to sustain ourselves.

Interviewer--John Howe

What do you think are the greatest threats to wilderness right now?

Robert Redford

The greatest threats to wilderness, I think, are is this sort of retarded thinking about it should be open for development, that's short term. I think America needs much more in terms of leadership, political leadership, needs much more long term thinking. We have a planet that's not going to grow, and if we don't start thinking about what we're going to preserve on our planet, there'll be nothing to live on or buy. So, to me that short term thinking is the greatest threat to wilderness. I think wilderness stands as a symbol of what are we going to preserve for our own dignity, our own heritage, our own state of being and mind.

Interviewer--John Howe

What do you think is going to happen for the future of wilderness in the west?

Robert Redford

I can't predict the future, nobody can. I can only say that there'll be people like myself, and I'm just one person that will continue to fight for preserving something that I think is

a great symbol of what-why America is great, and it's a physical symbol, and it's a natural symbol, and we're so lucky to have it. If we take it away, to me it would almost be criminal.

Interviewer--John Howe

What would you say to the other side who doesn't appreciate wilderness, for whatever reason? How can they be educated along those points of view?

Robert Redford

I think some people can never be educated, I think they're afraid-there may be people that are afraid of change and that kind of thing, but I think certain people are so rooted to thinking about resources as people did in the past-to be taken, and developed like manifest destiny. So, I suspect there'll, for some time anyway, there will always be that thinking that is rooted in that, and we'll never agree. Other people, I think, can be brought around if the dialogue is correct, if the dialogue is open-minded and fair. I think they can be brought around. I think the greatest point to be made, to have-be brought around, is think about your children, and theirs and theirs, and those yet to come.