



Dee Rowland

WOMEN PROTECTING
wilderness

As a part of the Women Protecting Wilderness Project, SUWA has been collecting stories from women about their experiences with wilderness. If you have a story you would like to share, please send it, with your photo to deeda@suwa.org. Below is Dee Rowland's story as told to SUWA intern Anna Paul, with editorial assistance from Nelle Ward.

I'm the 67-year-old mother of five grown daughters and five grandchildren. I've always been an outdoor person, and I try to get out to hike and backpack as often as I can. I recently took a sailing trip around the Apostle Islands on Lake Superior with one of my daughters and her family. The wonderful clarity of the water let you see the rocks and sand at the bottom of the lake, 15 feet down. To get there we took back-roads through healthy, green undeveloped forest. It made us all so happy to know it was there; everything was so undisturbed. I think our trip gave us all new appreciation for the Midwest; we explored a part of the country we had never really experienced before.

Oddly enough, I never actually had the opportunity to camp until I was married and had a child. Camping wasn't something my family did when I was growing up, but as a mother, I've had some adventures with my family. Once we were at a deserted lake in the Bighorn Mountains of Wyoming. We had our Volkswagon bus and our five children. The oldest of them was only 12 at the time. We were driving with our kayak and a small sail boat on our trailer, when we saw a huge rainstorm coming. We decided we had better not camp where we were heading. Instead we thought we'd find a place a different place, but we got stuck along the way. We tried leaving the trailer to make it easier, but it had started pouring and thundering so we ended up spending the night in the Volkswagon bus. The rain was just incredible; you even couldn't step out the door. In the middle of the night, someone knocked on our window and scared us half to death. It was a sheep herder on a horse that had come to check on us, which was a very nice gesture of him. We talked, and in the morning the sun came out. I remember spreading out a tarp and all of us having breakfast on this muddy little hillside, and that the sheep herder returned with a tractor to pull us out. We've had lots of adventures over the years that our children remember well. They were probably terrified at the time, but in retrospect they make great stories.

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Exploring the wilderness of the Midwest has been wonderful and I love living in Utah because of the variety that's all around us. I have many so different favorite places, I don't think I could chose just one. I really love any place that is uncluttered and quiet, but if I had to pick, I'd say one of my favorite trails is the Upper Muley Twist trail, although I was up in the wild flowers of Alta last week and that was wonderful too.

Being in the wilderness and experiencing life without other types of stimulation can be a meditative and spiritual experience. I work for the Catholic Diocese, and the Catholic Church is very concerned about wilderness and climate change. Through my work, I'm trying to promote ways in which people can live more simply and be more resourceful. We need to be aware of our impact upon the Earth and be able to see our real responsibility of doing it. habitat in order to do that.

be able to see our real responsibility of doing it. If we claim to be Christians, we have to care for the common good, and in order to do that we have to do something about climate change, each one of us. We will have to work collectively on public policy to get us there.

Our wilderness is threatened largely by recreational sports and energy needs. It's very upsetting to see the tracks of ATVs in the bottoms of the canyons and creek beds, but unfortunately there is not enough staff to enforce the rules. Developing a new ethic would be ideal, but considering that many don't follow the rules that are already enforced, we need to help people see *why* these rules are in place and should be followed first. Also, I fear that nuclear power is a big threat because it will encourage uranium mining, let alone problems with nuclear waste. On top of that, we have poor air and water quality. Then, there is the push for taking over designated wild lands to fulfill energy demands, so the threats are enormous and our wilderness is in jeopardy!

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I can't imagine life without wilderness. Living in a concrete city with no natural place to go, be it tropical or desert, would certainly diminish the quality of life. I feel good

about the role I play in protecting wilderness through my job and with my family. I think I've done a good job of influencing my children so that they respect the land and appreciate the wilderness. However, concerning public policy, I think each of us needs to be more aware and active about what kind of decisions are being made in our name, because we all own public land. At my job I now have the wonderful opportunity to promote awareness of climate change and to help others connect to it, in my case through our faith. To me, being Christian implies that we care about one another, and that's for the common good. We need to take steps to turn things around and find better ways to support our habitat in order to do that.

I want all women to get out and experience the wilderness, because for me, in order to have a real appreciation for it, I have to be out there in it. If I feel like a summer goes by without enough opportunities to sleep in a tent or out on a boat, then it's a wasted summer. So for all those women who don't like to camp and never venture out into wilderness, I would like you to know how vital it is to the health of your environment, and that just the fact that it's there provides your clean air and water. Remember that it's the legislators that make the decisions, and they're mostly men. But women are the nurturers and working for wilderness is just another aspect of being a mother. It's like looking out for your baby, even when it has grown out of your arms, and every mother can relate to that, thus caring for the environment. Wilderness is of value even if you never take a trip out there and women should be apart in the decision-making of it's future.

