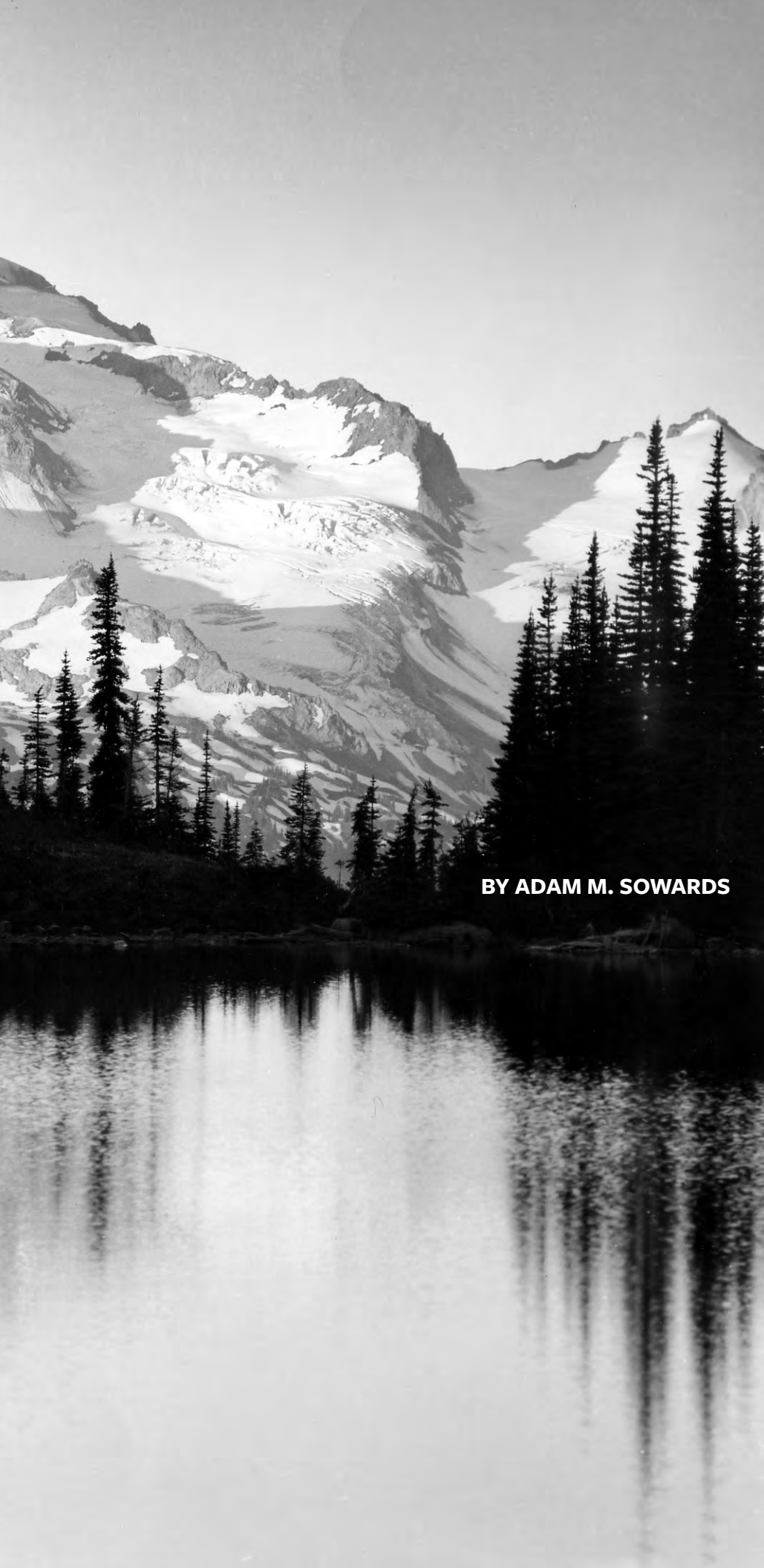




# Fighting Kennecott from the Supervisor's Office

*Harold Chriswell, the Wilderness Act,  
and Independence in the North Cascades*



BY ADAM M. SOWARDS

*When an unremarkable forest supervisor took on a multinational company in the name of wilderness preservation, his dogged independence showed the possibilities and limitations of wilderness management.*

In the mid-1960s, a U.S. Forest Service forest supervisor found himself in the middle of what seemed a local fight. Harold C. “Chris” Chriswell was not willing to stand idly by while one of the most scenic places on his turf, the Mt. Baker National Forest, snug against the Canadian border in Washington’s North Cascades, was destroyed. The Kennecott Copper Corporation had proposed to establish and operate an open-pit mine in the middle of Glacier Peak Wilderness Area, one of the first places protected by the recently signed Wilderness Act of 1964.<sup>1</sup> The local conflict quickly became the first national test of the law.

To gain congressional support for the Wilderness Act, especially among western members of Congress, conservationists had accepted a series of compromises. The most important focused on mining. The law allowed prospecting in wilderness areas until 1984 and could not prohibit bona fide mining within designated ones. Wilderness advocates disliked the so-called mining exception, but they were pragmatic and acquiesced to get the Wilderness Act signed into law.<sup>2</sup>

This conflict in the North Cascades was shaping up to be the first high-level test of the legislation between mining companies and wilderness advocates. Kennecott was within its legal rights to open the mine, but the idea seemed preposterous to conservationists. Mining companies aimed to establish their right to mine

U.S. FOREST SERVICE, 484197

**Glacier Peak, as seen from Image Lake, photographed in 1955.**

in designated wilderness, hard won during the negotiations that produced the Wilderness Act. Meanwhile, regional and national conservation groups, such as the North Cascades Conservation Council and the Sierra Club, wanted to stop any such plan, arguing that wilderness and mining were incompatible. That left the U.S. Forest Service, charged with managing wilderness areas within national forests, caught in the middle.

### **AN UNREMARKABLE HERO**

Enter Chris Chriswell, an otherwise unremarkable forest supervisor. The Forest Service's famously decentralized structure gave Chriswell, a midlevel administrator, some room to maneuver. But the agency's hierarchy limited a supervisor's power.<sup>3</sup> Chriswell certainly felt pressure to conform and follow orders from the regional office in Portland, Oregon, and the national headquarters in Washington, but agency leaders at these two levels did not stop his efforts. Chriswell's actions ended up being one of several small-scale events that disrupted and slowed Kennecott's momentum. Understanding how Chriswell tried to thwart a multinational corporation and work independently within the agency provides an understanding of the opportunities and limitations forest supervisors of the era faced. He is one of dozens of Forest Service employees who, throughout the agency's history, tried to alter or at least redirect the historical currents swirling around them, only to have their efforts forgotten by history.

Chriswell's professional biography does not read like that of a hero in a wilderness story, but rather represents a fairly typical account of a forest supervisor career. A graduate of the University of Washington's forestry program, he started with the Forest Service in 1935, then bounced around Region 6 in Oregon and Washington in forests on both sides of the Cascade

Mountains, learning how to manage grazing, timber, and recreation. He was appointed supervisor of the Mt. Baker National Forest in 1957.<sup>4</sup>

There were hints here and there of his independent streak. As supervisor, he showed a willingness in certain circumstances to lower commercial timber harvest goals, controversial in those days when "getting out the cut" drove the agency's agenda and western Washington's economy, as well as an employee's rate of promotion in the timber-focused agency. But if occasionally Chriswell might alter timber production targets, he typically supported Forest Service practices. He didn't hesitate to punch roads up river valleys to enable timber operations.<sup>5</sup> But the threat of an open-pit copper mine brought out Chriswell's appreciation for wilderness and protectiveness of Forest Service prerogatives.

### **COPPER FOR A PATRIOTIC CAUSE**

In the early 1950s, Kennecott had acquired a relatively small claim within what became Glacier Peak Wilderness Area at a place called Miners Ridge. The copper deposits had been located at the turn of the twentieth century, but their relative isolation and comparative low quality (less than 1 percent) meant they had remained unprofitable. During World War II, the Forest Service reluctantly approved a road to the mine site, but the war ended before it was built. Never dying down after this near-miss, rumors that the mine would be developed continued to circulate in Northwest conservation circles. When the war in Vietnam began escalating in the mid-1960s and an apparent copper shortage alarmed American strategists, Kennecott believed it was time to develop its claims for capitalistic and patriotic reasons. Meanwhile, hikers and especially photographers had continued to seek out Miners Ridge, a premier location in the Cascades where they could

record the stunning beauty of Glacier Peak's perfectly conical volcano reflected in the calm water of Image Lake. Backpackers reported increasing mining activity—test drilling and the like—in the years leading up to the company's public announcement.<sup>6</sup>

The next chapter in the history of Kennecott's copper mine opened in Chriswell's Bellingham, Washington, office in November 1966. Chriswell prepared for an upcoming meeting with Kennecott and contemplated ways to reduce its disruption to the wilderness. He intended to require the company to use block cave mining—a less intrusive but more expensive method that takes place underground—rather than open-pit mining, and to segregate the workers' housing, mill, and certain processing activities outside the wilderness area and even outside the national forest if possible. In short, Chriswell searched for ways to minimize the mine's harm, even suggesting that Kennecott be required to bury power lines and move ore through a pipeline.<sup>7</sup>

Chriswell's was a strong opening move, but his legal advisers in Portland told him that he likely lacked authority to carry out this plan. Wilderness values, an attorney in the regional office reminded him, "must here be weighed versus costs." Such advice had little specificity but was fully consistent with the Forest Service's longtime efforts to balance use of all resources on a national forest. The attorney's final words, though, revealed the weightiness of the upcoming meeting with Kennecott representatives: "You may wish to submit this matter to the Chief since precedent-making decisions seem to be involved." The frank acknowledgment that this was new territory for the agency indicated that Miners Ridge sat at the center of national forest management questions. And Kennecott's meeting with Chriswell was the first hurdle the company needed to clear.<sup>8</sup>

## Forest supervisor to retire in April

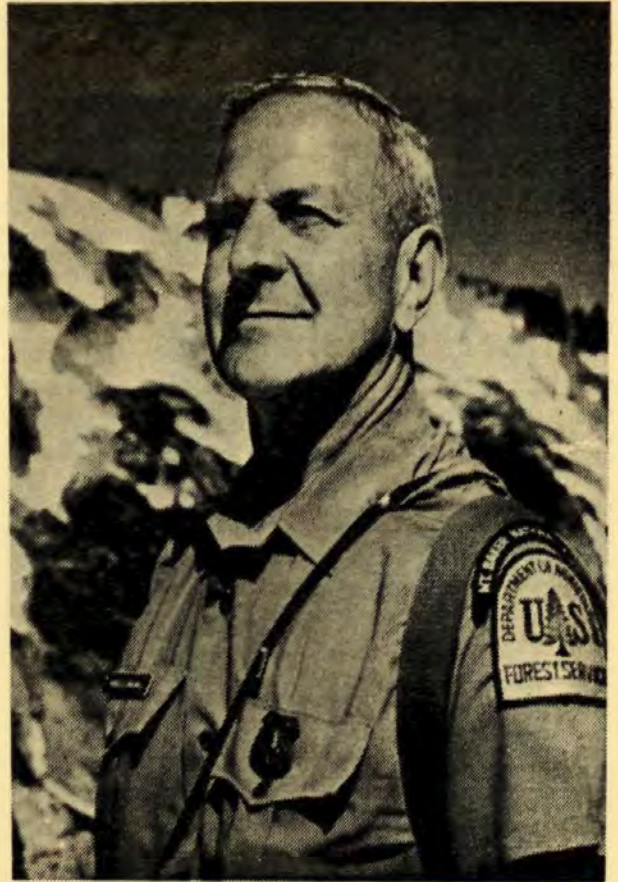
Harold C. (Chris) Chriswell, supervisor of the Mt. Baker National Forest since 1957, will retire April 9.

Before being promoted to supervisor, he served five years on the Mt. Hood National Forest, Portland, and was district ranger on the Umatilla, Olympic, Gifford Pinchot and Rogue River National Forests prior to that.

A longtime outdoorsman, Chriswell is intimately acquainted with the rugged North Cascades of Washington. In a recent special assignment he served as the Forest Service representative in a joint study with the National Park Service to develop management plans for the North Cascades National Park complex and adjacent lands of the Mt. Baker, Wenatchee, and Okanogan National Forests.

A graduate of the University of Washington, he has served on National Forests in Washington and Oregon since 1935, when he received his initial appointment on the Malheur National Forest, John Day, Oregon.

His successor has not yet been chosen, Regional Forester Charles A. Connaughton, U.S. Forest Service, said.



HAROLD C. CHRISWELL  
Shown with outdoors he loves

Kennecott representatives left the meeting at the Mt. Baker supervisor's office prepared to move forward but did not make a formal proposal or file any paperwork. In December 1966, when Kennecott announced its plans to start an open-pit mine on Miners Ridge, Chriswell acknowledged that the courts might ultimately decide the rules, but in the meantime he assured the public of the agency's power to "control things," saying, "We have told Kennecott it would have to bring in all possible alternatives if, as and when it makes a formal application. . . . We will exercise all control possible within the law to protect wilderness values."<sup>9</sup> Chriswell promised nothing specific and stuck to promoting wilderness values, asserting that he would control Kennecott as much as the law and courts would allow. Such public statements from Chriswell, as

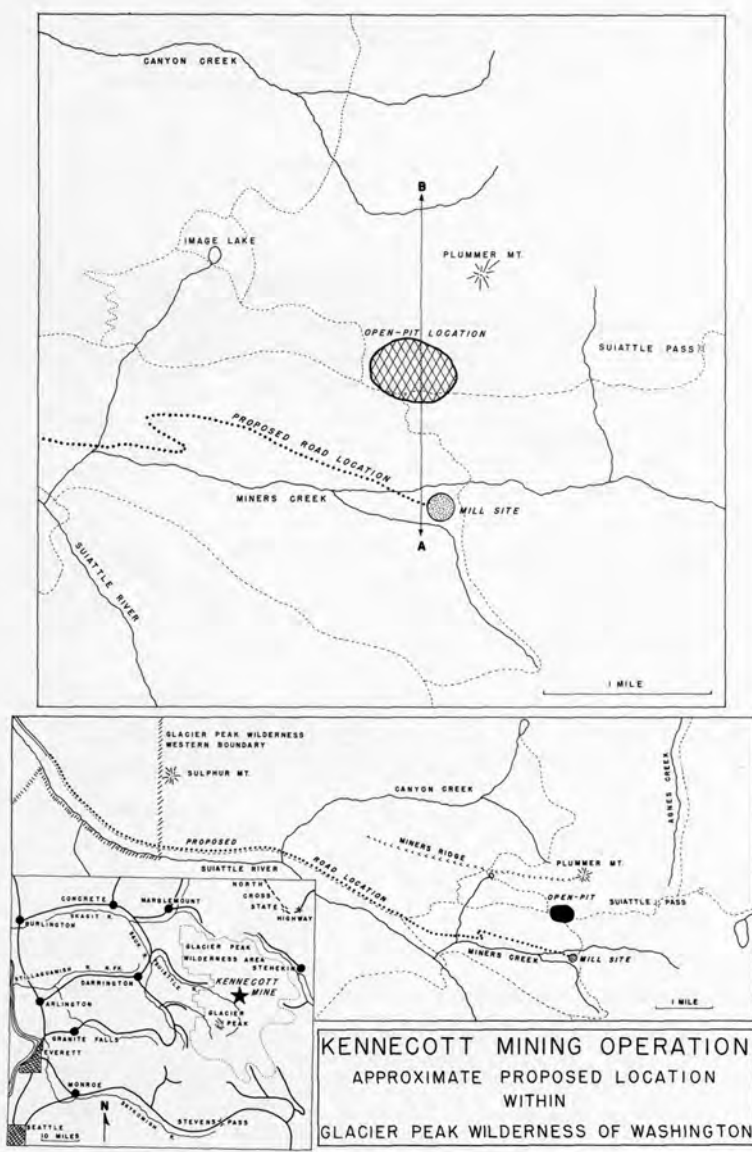
**A local newspaper published this photo of Harold Chriswell alongside an article announcing his retirement in 1971. The caption read, "Shown with the outdoors he loves," but the short article made no mention of the Kennecott fight. It was reprinted in the April-May 1971 issue of the North Cascades Conservation Council's newsletter *The Wild Cascades*.**

ambiguous as they were, might have encouraged conservationists.

Conservationists got what they wanted from Chriswell's boss, the regional forester, J. Herbert Stone, who was quoted in local papers as saying that an open-pit mine was not compatible with wilderness. Local conservationists agreed and pressed the Forest Service to take a stand. Correspondence flew from offices in the Northwest to politicians in the nation's capital before Arthur Greeley, an associate chief in the agency, doused their enthusiasm. Writing to the local member of the U.S. Congress,

Greeley pointed out that although the Forest Service could exercise some control of mining activity—as Chriswell had already promised—it could not "nullify the law by imposing regulations that would make mining not possible." Greeley's statement might have been the official agency line, but differing opinions appeared across the Northwest.<sup>10</sup>

Supervisor Chriswell became dogged—and independent. He met with Snohomish County officials and learned that Kennecott needed county permits for an open-pit mine. If that happened, county officials



little from previous utterances, but then Chriswell pushed further: “But we need to *establish our right* [emphasis added] to determine this and to take the lead as the agency best qualified to protect these areas.” To assert its right to regulate mining moved the Miners Ridge issue into national prominence and precedents, for it would establish—rightly, in Chriswell’s mind—the agency’s prerogatives and responsibilities.

If the county planning commission held a hearing, the Forest Service, in Chriswell’s view, needed to be unequivocal and state that Kennecott’s open-pit plan was “completely incompatible” and that accordingly, the agency would impose “tighter” restrictions than in “other areas where wilderness values [were] not as great.” Even more, the Forest Service ought to use the hearing to educate the public about the “basic weakness” in the Wilderness Act, a weakness that hampered its *raison d’être*: to protect wilderness. Presumably this strategy aimed to build public support, perhaps even to call for legislative adjustments to bolster Forest Service power.

How should we interpret Chriswell’s ideas, which seem inconsistent with the statements from the agency’s Washington and regional offices? In part, Chriswell sought to maintain bureaucratic prerogatives and power in a situation quickly leaving the agency’s control. In part, he recognized a fundamental weakness in the wilderness legislation and aimed to operate somewhat independently to advocate a stronger Forest Service position. And Chriswell was just getting started.

**A SHOW-ME TRIP TO GLACIER PEAK**

If winter was the season of meetings and correspondence, summertime meant field activity. In the summer of 1967, Chriswell again showed initiative by taking a prominent group into the

**This map showing the proposed mine location was published in the December–January 1967 issue of *The Wild Cascades* and came out shortly after Chriswell met with Kennecott officials in his office. The entire 23-page issue was devoted to the controversy.**

explained, the Forest Service would be called as an expert witness at a hearing. Informing the regional office of these developments, Chriswell used the opportunity to advance a strong position for the Forest Service,

one that seemed inconsistent with Greeley’s directions from Washington and earlier instructions from Portland.<sup>11</sup>

Kennecott controlled eleven potential mines in wilderness areas across the nation. In some places, Chriswell explained to the regional forester, they could mine with few problems, but in other places, “conflict with wilderness values will be so severe, as in this case, that our restrictions would make mining uneconomical except in a national emergency.” This position differed

mountains on a show-me trip. Forest supervisors had used this tactic before as an effective way to show interested parties the conditions firsthand and generate support for agency initiatives. Sometimes the strategy backfired, as when foresters in Oregon offered an informational tour in the Three Sisters Primitive Area in 1951 that, in the end, galvanized wilderness activists against the agency.<sup>12</sup>

Chriswell, however, executed the trip with political and public relations precision by including members of the regional press and Seattle mayor Dorm Braman. A man with longtime experience in the lumber industry and a love for the outdoors forged as a Boy Scout leader, Braman was a lifelong Republican who readily worked across political lines.<sup>13</sup> Chriswell expertly used the opportunity to vaunt the area, explain the Forest Service's position, and break the news of agency restrictions on Kennecott's operation.

One of the region's leading daily newspapers, the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, carried the story on

the front page with a beautiful color photograph. Besides framing the controversy visually, the newspaper reported the latest developments and agency perspectives. During the three-day pack trip, Chriswell had announced agency regulations, the most severe of which would require Kennecott to dispose of mine waste so that it would "not affect stream flow or otherwise adversely affect land or water." According to the newspaper, Chriswell asserted that most Forest Service employees opposed Kennecott's mine "on general principles," noting the basic incompatibility of mining and wilderness.<sup>14</sup>

The Wilderness Act allowed what it termed "reasonable regulations" on mining, but Chriswell understood and explained the rub: "What we think is reasonable might not appear reasonable at all to the Kennecott people." Such statements, delivered within view of Glacier Peak, helped the Forest Service pitch itself as the responsible protectors of wilderness—

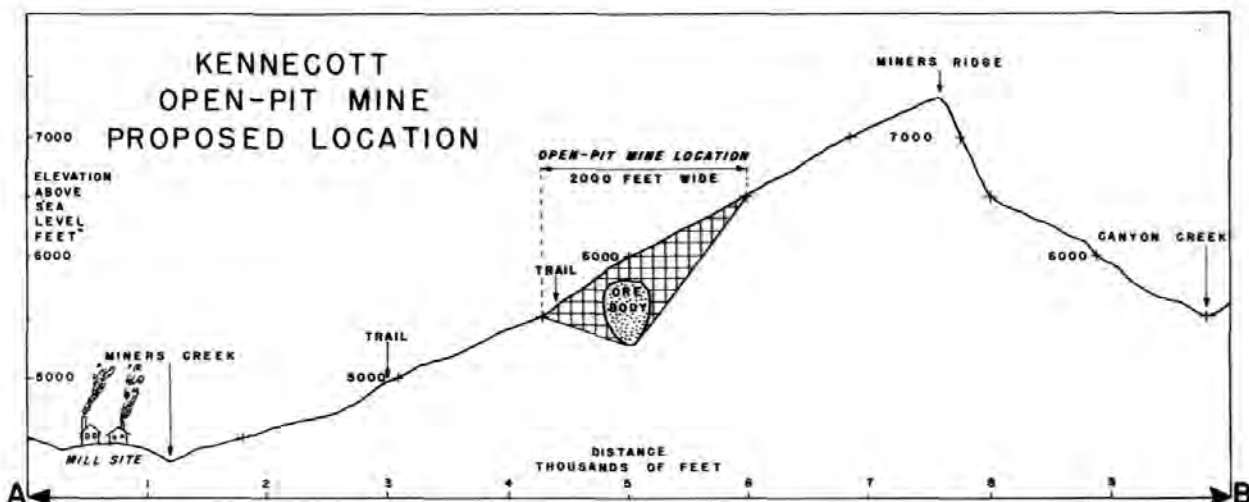
an image that seemed a far cry from the truth to conservationists who had seen the agency exclude timbered valleys from wilderness areas. Kennecott's plans gave the Forest Service an opportunity to rehabilitate its regional image to conservationists, and Chriswell seized it.<sup>15</sup>

A feature in the glossy *Seattle* magazine followed in the fall, in which Chriswell's summer tour group was referred to as "the North Cascades exploratory party," a rather grandiose characterization. The story, "Ride-In to Glacier Peak," outlined Kennecott's plan and expressed outrage and disgust. A Forest Service ranger, Calvin Dunnell, had briefed the party after a dinner of T-bone steaks and salad—not exactly rustic trail fare. Following the agency's developing script, Dunnell

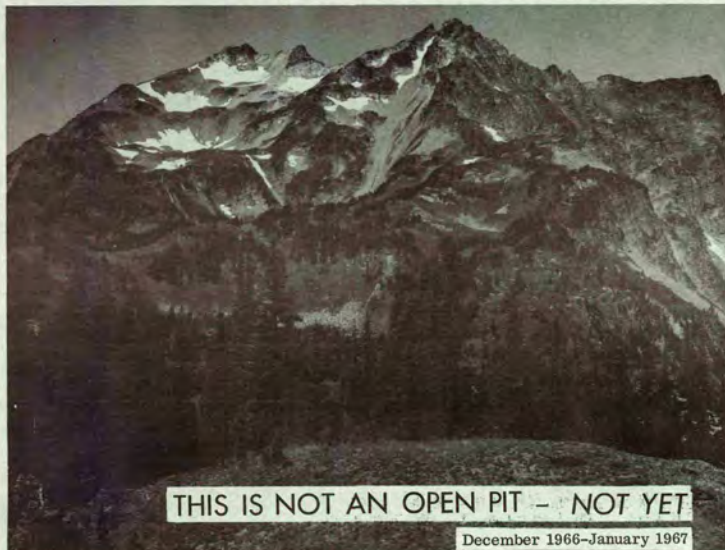
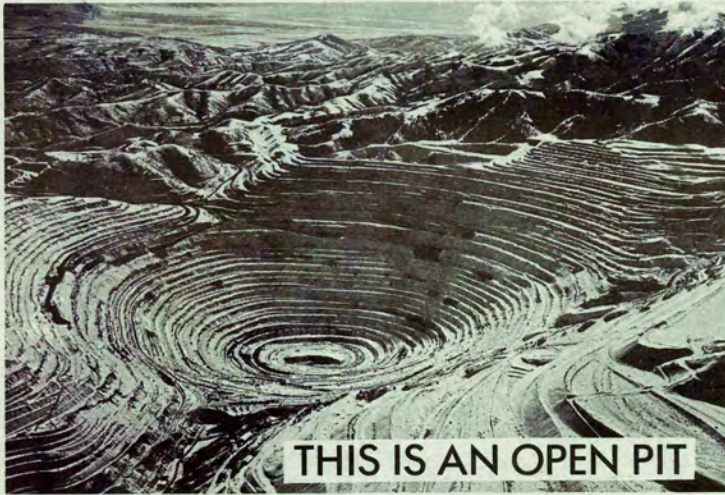
Also published in the December–January 1967 issue of *The Wild Cascades* was this diagram showing the location and depth of the open pit mine. The pit was estimated to be 2,000 feet wide.

### The Wild Cascades

**\*\*The open pit will extend from Lady Camp (1 mile east of Image Lake) 2000 feet east, and will be 500 feet deep. The following sketch shows what the pit may look like when completed.**



## THE WILD CASCADES



The cover of the issue of *The Wild Cascades* showed Kennecott's open pit copper mine at Bingham, Utah, and contrasted it with a photo of Plummer Mountain, the site of Kennecott's proposed mine in the Glacier Peak Wilderness Area.

emphasized the Forest Service's regulatory demands, including close attention to controls on tailings, and shared what he saw as the best- and worst-case scenarios. The worst case would be that Forest Service regulations would "diminish the havoc Kennecott would wreak." The best case would be that restrictions would

force corporate reconsideration and effectively prevent Kennecott from digging its pit. Dunnell's confidence that one or the other outcome would transpire reflected a common trait of agency staff, a sometimes-overweening sense of their ability to rule their world, directly at odds with reality in the mid-1960s.<sup>16</sup>

According to the magazine article, the last night of Chriswell's show-me tour for Forest Service officials and journalists "turned out to be nearly as spectacular as the day had been." After winding their way up countless switchbacks, they saw the site of the proposed mining operation. They also felt watched by Glacier Peak, always standing guard over the other mountains and valleys. They saw a tree carving, famous among Northwest hikers, and camped in full view of Image Lake's beauty. "The moon was all but full," the writer described, "and perhaps under its influence, the horses, grazing nearby, ran amok, frisking and whinnying and almost trampling the campers who had shunned the stuffy confines of a tent." This image of horses running free under the wild moon symbolized what might be lost—and why some were fighting for it.<sup>17</sup>

At this point, Chriswell mostly disappears from the historical record. He faded so quickly that when the North Cascades Conservation Council reprinted an article from a local newspaper in its newsletter announcing his retirement in 1971, neither the newspaper nor the newsletter's editor mentioned his involvement in obstructing Kennecott four years earlier.<sup>18</sup> Perhaps his supervisors in Portland or back in Washington, tired of having to placate Kennecott, let Chriswell know that he needed to drop the issue. At the same time Chriswell was contesting Kennecott, the Forest Service became preoccupied with fending off the National Park Service and its allies in the public and in Congress, who were ultimately successful in shaking loose some 670,000 acres of national forest land and placing it into North Cascades National Park.<sup>19</sup> But during the months Chriswell searched for ways to stymie Kennecott, he demonstrated a strong determination to make the Forest Service assert its power under the Wilderness Act

to regulate mining. He showed the possibilities for independence within the agency and, ultimately, the limits of the Forest Service, or a forest supervisor, in stopping a multinational corporation empowered under the law.

## EPILOGUE

Although the open-pit mine was not developed, it was not Chriswell but factors beyond his control that derailed the enterprise. The forest supervisor was one of several things that stood in Kennecott's way, each one drawing public attention and slowing down Kennecott's momentum. National leaders, such as Secretary of Agriculture Orville Freeman and the Supreme Court Justice (and environmentalist) William O. Douglas, weighed in with speeches at events that opposed the open-pit mine. College students held rallies and protests; one student in Ohio launched a petition campaign and ultimately met with Kennecott leaders. A local doctor bought shares of corporate stock so that he could speak at Kennecott's national shareholder meeting and object to its actions. Such actions and activities produced national press that generally supported wilderness preservation and castigated Kennecott's short-term plans. Meanwhile, a volatile copper price made Kennecott's investment always seem marginal. What had seemed a near-certainty in late 1966 was all but forgotten as the 1970s started; the moment had passed, even if the shadow still hung over the decade. Kennecott sold its claims in 1986 to the Chelan County Public Utility District. The Wild Sky Wilderness bill, signed in 2008 to establish a new wilderness area adjacent to the Glacier Peak Wilderness, included a land swap between the public utility district and the Forest Service, resulting in a conservation easement that foreclosed the possibility of the mine and ended forever the threat.

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## NOTES

1. Wilderness Act, Public Law 88-577, *Statutes at Large*, 78 (1964): 890-97. Full citations are available in the book.
2. For specifics on passing the Wilderness Act, the mining exception, and compromise, see Mark Harvey, *Wilderness Forever: Howard Zahniser and the Path to the Wilderness Act* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005), 204, 237; Steven Schulte, *Wayne Aspinall and the Shaping of the American West* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2002), 115-62; and Doug Scott, *The Enduring Wilderness: Protecting Our Natural Heritage through the Wilderness Act* (Golden, CO: Fulcrum, 2004), 47-55.
3. For more on forest supervisors, see Herbert Kaufman, *The Forest Ranger: A Study in Administrative Behavior* (reprint ed., Washington, DC: Resources for the Future, 2006); Grant McConnell, *Private Power and American Democracy* (New York: Knopf, 1966).
4. "Forest Supervisor to Retire in April," *Skagit Valley Herald*, March 19, 1971, reprinted in *The Wild Cascades* (April-May 1971), 13, <http://npshistory.com/newsletters/the-wild-cascades/april-may-1971.pdf>.
5. Harold C. Chriswell, *Memoirs* (Bellingham, WA: H. Chriswell, 1989); Gerald W. Williams, *The U.S. Forest Service in the Pacific Northwest: A History* (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2009), 148, 153, 181-82; Harvey Manning with the North Cascades Conservation Council, *Wilderness Alps: Conservation and Conflict in Washington's North Cascades* (Bellingham, WA: Northwest Wild Books, 2007), 124.
6. An overview that captures most of this material appears in Manning with the North Cascades Conservation Council, *Wilderness Alps*.
7. Forest Supervisor, Mt. Baker, Bellingham, Washington, to Regional Forester, September 26, 1966, Box: Region 6, Division of Recreation and Lands Recreation Studies (095-76B2307 Box 3-1990), Folder: Wildernesses and Primitive Areas Glacier Peak Wilderness, Folder #3B Mineral Prospecting and Mining, Records of the US Forest Service, Record Group 95, National Archives, Seattle, WA.

8. C. C. Carlson, Portland, Oregon, to Philip L. Heaton, October 6, 1966, Box: Region 6, Division of Recreation and Lands Recreation Studies (095-76B2307 Box 3-1990), Folder: Wildernesses and Primitive Areas Glacier Peak Wilderness, Folder #3B Mineral Prospecting and Mining, RUSFS.
9. Walt Woodward, "Open-Pit Copper Mine Possible in Proposed Park," *Seattle Times*, December 22, 1966.
10. "Wilderness Act Bars Pit Mine," *Bellingham Herald*, January 17, 1967; M. Brock Evans to Herbert J. Stone, Portland, Oregon, January 20, 1967 (Evans mistakenly reversed the J. and Herbert in his name); Patrick D. Goldsworthy, Seattle, to Orville L. Freeman, Washington, DC, March 9, 1967; A. W. Greeley, Washington, DC, to Lloyd Meeds, February 10, 1967; all in Box 8, Folder: Kennecott Mine General Correspondence 1967, North Cascades Conservation Council Records, Special Collections, University of Washington, Seattle, WA.
11. This paragraph and the next two draw from a letter, Forest Supervisor, Mt. Baker, to Regional Forester, March 13, 1967, Division of Recreation and Lands Recreation Studies (095-76B2307 Box 3-1990), Folder: Wildernesses and Primitive Areas Glacier Peak Wilderness, Folder #3B Mineral Prospecting and Mining, RUSFS.
12. Kevin R. Marsh, *Drawing Lines in the Forest: Creating Wilderness Areas in the Pacific Northwest* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007), 21-23, 27.
13. His son composed a useful biography: Jim Braman, "Braman, James d'Orma (Dorm), (1901-1980)," *HistoryLink.org*, September 10, 2002, <http://www.historylink.org/File/3919>.
14. "Stage Setting for an Open-Pit Copper Mine," *Seattle Sunday Post-Intelligencer*, August 27, 1967; "Restrictions Announced on Open Copper Mine," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, August 27, 1967.
15. "Restrictions Announced on Open Copper Mine."
16. "Ride-In to Glacier Peak," *Seattle: The Pacific Northwest Magazine*, October 1967, 23-27, quotations from 26, 27.
17. "Ride-In to Glacier Peak," 27.
18. "Forest Supervisor to Retire in April."
19. According to "Forest Supervisor to Retire in April," Chriswell's last job before retiring was serving as Forest Service representative in a joint study with the National Park Service to develop management plans for the North Cascades National Park complex and adjacent national forests, including Mt. Baker.