

History of Wilderness Within Reach

A history of the Wilderness Within Reach Program began in 1989. A group of pilots primarily associated with the Ada County Aerial Sheriffs and those involved in the newly re-formed Idaho Aviation Association were concerned that certain groups and individuals were lobbying to close wilderness access to aircraft in many of the wilderness areas that had been effectively accessed by aircraft for years. Even though the Central Idaho Wilderness Act of 1980 preserved aviation access, many thought that airplanes were an aberration in the wilds of Idaho. I guess nobody told them that without airplanes, there would have been roads built to all of the inholdings. During the summer of 1989, the pilots put together a plan to offer aircraft access into the wilderness for those who could not physically accomplish a hike or horseback ride into the wilderness areas. On September 16, 1989, approximately 20 individuals were transported by volunteer pilots and air taxi operators to the Chamberlain Basin airstrip on a day trip to visit Stonebreaker Ranch and have a box lunch provided by The Vista Deli. The initial participants were associated with the A.M.A.S. (Alternative Mobility Adventure Seekers) program at Boise State University. We had several wheelchairs that day which required additional room in the aircraft. Since I was, by proxy, the director of the trip, I made a command decision to put the wheelchairs in the private aircraft which were much slower than the 200 series Cessna's. Thus, I had participants arrive about a half an hour before their chairs. That was a bit awkward to say the least having folks propped up against the trees waiting for their rides. I did not make that mistake again. My mother, Faye Corlett rode up with me on that day, and she had an old friend, Betty Penson, a former Statesman writer in tow. At that time, Mom was about 82 years old, and up for any good adventure. Our namesake Wilderness Within Reach embodies our continual mission to illustrate that aircraft are essential so that all people have the ability to access roadless areas. The name of our program was coined by a longtime aviator Larry Taylor.

Over the last 28 years the program has matured from a single day trip to a 2-night stay at a wilderness ranch. In the early days, the trips were to Chamberlain. Trips morphed into a single overnight at Big Creek and Sulphur Creek in the next few years. We, as pilots, figured that a two night trip would not be any more work than a single night stay. As such, we started using the Johnson Creek airfield for our 2-night trips, and did that for several years. The logistics were substantial. We drove the food and beverages to the campsite, but flew the participants and all of their camping gear in charter and private aircraft. During the Johnson Creek years the Idaho Aviation Foundation (IAF) took over the program, in essence paying for all of the food and beverages. Over the past 10 years we have been going to Sulphur Creek Ranch. By doing that, we have removed the need to transport camping equipment and food. As a result, we have needed fewer aircraft to accomplish our mission. The IAF fully sponsors the cost of the trip for the attendees.

The Wilderness Within Reach program would not be possible without the help of the pilots and air taxi operators here in Idaho. The IAF has assured the continuation of the funding for the program which is a signature project for the Foundation's mission. Long time air taxi sponsors have included Arnold Aviation, McCall Air Taxi, S.P. Aircraft, Salmon Air Taxi, Sawtooth Aviation, Conyan Aviation, McCall Aviation/AvCenter, Gem Air, and G. & S. Aviation. These professionals have stepped up every year to assist in our transportation efforts at a great cost of labor, equipment, and fuel. We cannot thank them enough. The Boise City Parks and Recreation Program, AdVenture has partnered with WWR after the A.M.A.S. group was moved to become their organization. Over the years we have had youngsters to elderly people with disabilities enjoy our trips to the backcountry. The general aviation volunteers are virtually too numerous to name regardless of whether they flew or just supported our efforts. By proxy, every member of the Idaho Aviation Association has assisted through funding in the early years to providing help with each year's event. The IAF allows a tax-deductible option for individuals and companies to continue contributing directly to the WWR program. With the financial support, there should be no end to this worthwhile and very meaningful program.