



# Donna Land

## 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](mailto:deeda@suwa.org). Below is Donna Land Maldondo's story as told to SUWA intern Anna Paul, with editorial assistance from Nelle Ward.**

My name is Donna Land Maldondo, and I am a Northern Ute from northeastern Utah. I go hiking in southern Utah a couple times a year, and I go out to the reservation for ceremonies. I think wilderness is extremely important. I was born on the Ute reservation in Uinta county with sage, cedar and the rivers right out the back door, and I always took it for granted. I was used to so use to it, I didn't even think about it. My most memorable experiences are of camping up in the mountains, among trees and streams, where my grandmother would pick wild garlic.

I've always enjoyed trips down to southern Utah with friends. I love the drive itself and enjoying all the different landscapes and formations. When I'm out in the wilderness and no one's around, I most deeply enjoy the sensation of belonging with the Earth, feeling that you're just one tiny piece of the whole environment and not actually separate from it.

I believe that the Creator made everything, and that we all have spirits – the rocks, trees, animals, everything. I don't feel that one necessarily needs to go to church or to a ceremony to feel the spirituality of the land. If you let yourself, you can feel it.

I have four grown daughters who were born and raised in the city. My youngest daughter and I took a trip when she had just turned 18 and I knew she'd soon be off on her own path. We went down to Capital Reef and experienced a majestic sunrise. We slept in the back of the Jeep and hiked around together. It was really fun.

I wish people would leave the wilderness alone. I know it's nice to have private cabins and property, but it's always that "not in my backyard" syndrome. I've got my cabin here, and now I don't want anybody else. There are a lot of groups helping to conserve the wilderness and landscape, but somehow we need to get the general public more involved. I'm a perfectly good example of someone who takes this place for granted, as someone who grew up there and assumed the wilderness would always be there. I don't think that the management of our lands is well thought out. It's all up to Congress and those in the legislature to decide where things go. I appreciate organizations like Nature Conservancy and Ducks Unlimited who are actually buying land to preserve it. I guess we have to buy the land in order to protect it, if that's what it takes.

I think money is biggest threat our wilderness faces and the encroachment of mining, oilrigs, construction, etc. It's almost as if our generation has no consideration for the next; it's always, "let's do it now because we need it now." We don't even think about what our actions mean for our children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

It's important to spread awareness about the peril of our wilderness; things aren't always going to be what they are. If we don't take care of things today, they might not even be here tomorrow. We need to nurture everything we have. I think if most people were more educated about these types of things, most people would agree that wilderness is of value and would help in some way.

Protecting the wilderness is important to me, but sometimes I don't know how to go about doing it. Although I write letters to politicians occasionally, we could achieve a lot if everyone was more active and willing to spend a little extra time on these issues together. The grassroots movements have made the real changes in the past after all. People of every race, class and gender need to be considered in these movements. I think sometimes we disregard the masses because we think that they don't have the understanding, money or time. If you look at any political movement in this country, those involved have been either directly or indirectly affected. You don't see many people of color involved with the environment unless it's in their area, and I think a lot of it is due to eco-racism. For example, when you look at wilderness advocacy ads, you see very few women and almost no people of color. I think there needs to be more outreach geared towards those who aren't rich, powerful, white and male. Unfortunately I don't have a solution for that, but I think it can be done because it has been done. It just takes charisma and community organizing.

If women don't protect our Mother Earth, I'm not sure it's going to get done. Since the beginning of time, women have been the keepers of the fire. They have been the keepers of the story. Women are much more powerful than we assume.

In one-hundred years, I want Utah to have the same open space that it does now and to be less dependent on oil. All that Utah needs is smarter people to make it happen.