INTO THE WILD

The call of the wild beckons many people in many ways. Some savor the solitude and the feeling of life pared down to its bare necessities. Others revel in the beauty of natural places and work to protect expanses of pristine land, such as the Three Ridges and Priest areas in Virginia. Their work can be seen in an omnibus wilderness bill presented to Congress this year.

Here are the stories of U.Va. alumni who have heeded that call and now share their love of wild places.

BY SIERRA BELLOWS, PAUL EVANS AND DOUG MCINNIS

David Carr on the Moormans River, Albemarle County, Virginia

continued on reverse
THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED

David Carr grew up on a dairy farm in Albemarle County, wading in creeks and canoeing on the local rivers. "I lived outdoors, so I felt deeply familiar with the land here," says Carr (Law ’83). As he grew into adulthood, he experienced the county's rapid development. "The character of the area was changing before my eyes. In the ’70s, pollution seriously threatened the Rivanna Reservoir that supplied water to Charlottesville and much of Albemarle," says Carr. "I began to realize that the places that I loved might not survive if someone didn’t protect them."

Carr considered a degree in planning but felt that law school would best equip him for his calling: environmental protection. "The law has always been the first and the last line of defense for natural resources and beautiful places," says Carr. "If we aren’t successful through general advocacy and persuasive powers, we can resort to the courts."

Carr became the first staff attorney at the Southern Environmental Law Center (SELC) soon after it was founded by Rick Middleton (Col ’68) in 1986. Since then, his work has been instrumental in safeguarding public land. "From the beginning, we wanted to protect the back country from roadbuilding, logging and other development," says Carr. "Most people don’t realize that national forests are open to development. They aren’t national parks."

Sometimes creating new environmental legislation is a demanding and agonizingly slow process. In 1997, the SELC sought public and congressional support to protect roadless areas in national forests. They wanted an administrative rule that would put a moratorium on roadbuilding in designated areas nationwide. The Clinton administration agreed to the rule, but in January 2001 the Bush administration put it on hold. "I am looking forward to the next administration to see these areas permanently protected," says Carr.

Yet Carr remains determined and has enjoyed significant victories in the past 23 years. "There are 5 million acres of national forest land in southern Appalachia, and through our advocacy we’ve given stronger protection to 2 million acres of it," he says.

The SELC now includes nearly 40 attorneys (15 of whom attended U.Va.) that advocate in six states on issues as diverse as public land and climate change. "We address a plethora of problems—clean air and water, energy use, and transportation to name a few—because they are all fundamentally connected to preserving the environment that sustains us all," says Carr. "Our urban lives are utterly dependent on nature; any separation between the two is illusory. We rely on the wilderness for the very air we breathe."