# Crosscuts

Created by: Jennifer Ogden

“Rings”, written by Nathan Grooms

“Rings” is an account by Wilderness and Trails Assistant Crew Leader Nathan Grooms published in the September 29, 2026 edition of the Selway-Bitterroot Frank Church (SBFC) Wilderness blog post. The writer recalls the experience working with a partner in SBFC using an antique crosscut saw to remove a “glory tree”; an exceptionally decadent Ponderosa Pine. As the bucking saw progresses through the diameter of the tree, Grooms recalls personal and family milestones. The tree itself is older than the U.S. government. Its yearly rings have been witness to local and national events.

*This is a nuanced personal memoir, which may count as a secondary source of information and personal experience of a wilderness ranger.



Fish Lake Art Residency

*The Harvester. Cyanotype on Paper, 84” x 18”, 2019.*

Artist and Mountaineer Jonathon Marquis remarks on his experience as an artist in residence at Fish Lake Guard Station in the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness, the site of a backcountry airstrip. The artists residency program was a partnership between Open AIR, The Selway Bitterroot Frank Church Foundation, and The U.S. Forest Service. Marquis’ work includes enhanced cyanotype images of saws hanging on the guard station walls.




[“The Wilderness Tool”]

Roman Mars’ 99percentinvisible.org is a podcast which relies on in-person interviews of people for overarching thematic ideas. Although the remarks made by Dolly Chapman, a wilderness trail worker of 30 years, and a collector of antique crosscut saws are primary, they are edited by producer and reporter Lasha Madan into a narrative about the initial role that saws had in clearing away obstacles, creating pathways that enhanced human mobility, displacement of Native people on their ancestral territory, and ultimately bringing the rest of the American population into wild places for the sake of settlement, tourism, and recreation. As Industrialization laid waste to resources and (ostensibly) untouched landscapes, people romanticized, rather than feared the wild. When designated Wilderness areas gained protections, the antique crosscut saws were once again favored by rangers working within their boundaries.

Saw Policy

The Forest Service, working with other agencies, partners and the public, established a policy for training and use of cross-cut and chain saws. Sawyers covered by those policies often maintain trails on national forests and grasslands, help fight wildfires, and work in wilderness where crosscut saws are required. The national saw directive

standardizes training, evaluation, certification, and safety procedures for sawyers operating on lands managed by the agency.

## Contextual Paragraph

The crosscut saw is a standard tool used in United States Wilderness Areas due to the restrictions of mechanized and gas-powered chainsaws or motorized vehicles. Its inherent value as a less invasive management tool helps preserve the untrammeled reputation of pristine wilderness.

*In 1964, Congress passed The Wilderness Act, and America did something no other country had ever done: it passed a law to protect land and preserve it in its natural state. The act brought about some major changes because of the way it defined wilderness. On top of being untrammeled, capital W wilderness was now an area without mechanization and the presence of motors. So in a federally designated wilderness area, there are no snowmobiles, motorboats, bicycles, or cars allowed. And for the hundreds of people who work in the American wilderness today, this means they can't use jackhammers, powered rock drills, or chainsaws. Crosscuts first made a comeback because they had to, but now they're increasingly desirable even in non-wilderness areas where chainsaws are technically allowed.*

-Excerpted from 99percent Invisible "The Wilderness Tool", reported and produced by Lasha Madan

## Key Questions

1. Describe the reason that crosscut saws are required equipment in Wilderness Areas.
2. Name the artistic works created by Nathan Grooms and Jonathon Marquis. Describe what you think they each represent.
3. Name two ways that Dolly Chapman expresses her appreciation of and experience with crosscut saws. How are they of note?
4. What do the three main characters in these narratives have in common regarding their role in Wilderness Areas? Compare and contrast how they agree or vary.
5. How does the crosscut saw symbolize proper management of wild areas?

## Assessment

1. How does the public lands conservation movement benefit from artists being connected to wild places?