

# The Wild Effect

By **Liz Bergeron**, PCTA Executive Director and CEO

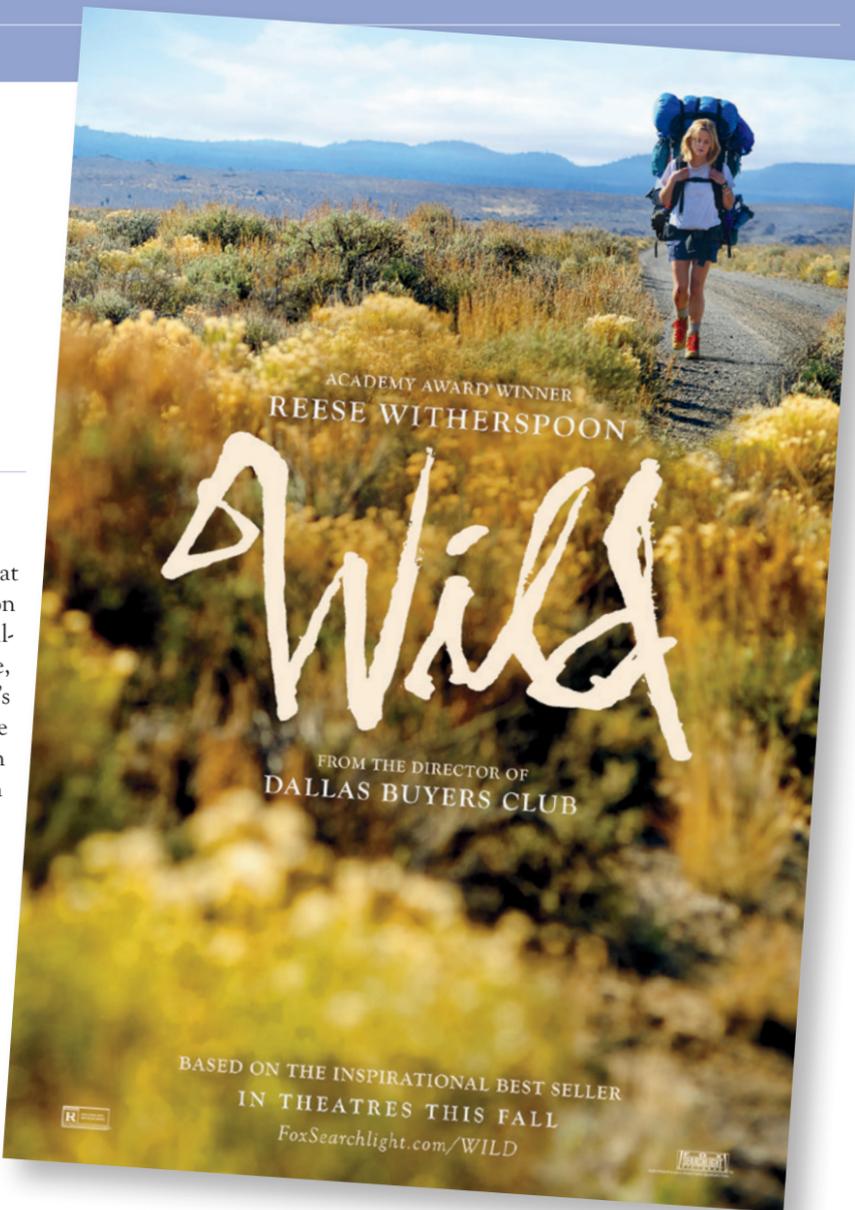


We recently learned that *Wild*, the movie based on **Cheryl Strayed's** best-selling book of the same title, will be released Dec. 5. It's been a long time in the making, and we have been working for nearly a year on getting the most out of it.

Upon hearing of the plans for a film adaptation of the book, to star **Reese Witherspoon**, we approached the producers at Fox Searchlight last fall and offered our help with the production. Not only did they welcome our participation, they embraced our goal of making sure that the Pacific Crest Trail and the trail experience were managed and portrayed accurately. Because of the logistics of bringing in truckloads of filming equipment and supplies to remote locations, it was simply impossible to film many scenes on the real PCT, so we helped scout locations and design accurate-looking signs for scenes that had to be shot away from the actual trail.

It's been a lot of fun. Some of our staff and board members visited the set and got to see the process firsthand. We're also working behind the scenes to ensure that the trail will benefit as much as possible. **John Ptak**, a PCTA donor and volunteer who lives in Los Angeles and works in the film industry, has helped us navigate the complicated world of movie production and promotion with an eye toward ensuring that the PCTA is well considered. The potential for increasing awareness of our work is significant. A whole new moviegoing audience will be introduced to the PCT, the PCTA and the importance of preserving our natural landscapes. What a great opportunity!

Our recently developed strategic plan makes raising awareness of our work a priority. The plan speaks to the need to broaden our membership to connect new people to the trail and our work. This film will be seen by millions of people who have never heard of the trail or the PCTA. People will support what they know and care about. As the movie audience searches for information, we will tell



them about the PCTA and why our work is crucial to the long-term preservation of the PCT and the landscapes surrounding it.

It's an exciting time. Because of the book and the early publicity about the movie, we're already fielding calls from the media and from people who want to get out on the PCT. We believe it's our responsibility to use this opportunity in the spotlight to bring in additional resources that will help us fulfill our long-term mission.

But like a lot of things we deal with, the publicity that *Wild* will bring to the trail is not without controversy. There could be down-sides – what some are already calling the *Wild Effect* – for the trail.

Some people worry that too many people will hit the trail in the coming seasons and that already overused areas will be damaged even more. Some complain that unskilled hikers will get into trouble and will need rescuing, forcing land managers to consider restricting access for everyone. Others are even concerned about how the movie's adult content might reflect upon the trail. If you have read the book you know what I mean.

These concerns may be valid, but, ultimately, we have no control over the film's content or the public's reaction to it. What we do know is that the film is coming out and more people will know about the trail because of it. This will happen with or without PCTA involvement. We simply must channel the energy coming our way by introducing the movie audience to our work and get them involved as members, donors and volunteers.

The more we can be involved, the greater likelihood that we will meet our objective of converting *Wild* readers and moviegoers into supporters. We need to welcome those who are interested to the magic of the outdoors. We need to provide information on how to use the PCT safely and responsibly. We need to educate new users on Leave No Trace practices.

It's our duty to welcome and educate people, not turn them away. We will work closely with our trail partners to address the overuse that is already occurring and any future overuse. We welcome new users because we need more people to love the PCT so they care enough to protect it.

For all of us at the PCTA, being stewards of the trail is fulfilling in part because it has such a positive influence on people's lives. Like Cheryl's, there probably are thousands of amazing stories of self-reflection, transformation and redemption. Seeing the beauty, enduring the hardship of the day and reveling in the backcountry – alone or with friends and family – makes us feel alive and helps us focus on what's important in life. Cheryl is a great writer who happened to write a best-selling memoir about her time on the trail, but

that doesn't mean others are not experiencing similar life changes out there every day.

Recently a reporter asked me what my favorite part of the job is. My answer surprised her. It's the people I meet who make my work so rewarding. I care deeply about protecting and preserving the PCT so it's available for people to use and enjoy. That's what this work is really about – people like Cheryl whose lives have been changed.

I have spent some time with Cheryl and I really like her. She is a genuine, caring person who appreciates the outdoors. She takes her family on outdoor adventures and wants to backpack sections of the PCT with her husband and children when they are older. She has done great things for the trail.

There's been a great deal of conversation about *Wild* in online forums and social media. I came across this touching post from a young woman the other day on Facebook:

"I read the book and really enjoyed it. I can't wait to see the movie. I had heard of the PCT before but didn't really know what it was until I read *Wild* and looked it up online. The book really inspired me. I bought a daypack and started hiking on my days off. I've already lost 30 pounds. I might never be a hardcore thru-hiker but it feels great to get in shape while seeing awesome scenery."

For me, that's the true *Wild Effect*. 🌲

*Liz Bergeron*



When volunteer Roberta Cobb wanted a simple and convenient way to keep her PCTA membership current, she chose to give through our monthly giving program, the **Crest Circle!**

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