

# *Liberty & Wilderness*



*William O Douglas leads a hike protesting a proposed coastal highway at Pacific Beach, Washington, 1958.  
Photo by Ira Spring , Olympic Park Institute*

William O. Douglas Film Project

Produced by  
Oregon Cultural Heritage Commission



### **Introduction**

William O. Douglas was a beacon for the preservation of wild places and individual freedom, by word and by example. These were parallel rights to be defended without reservation.

Douglas described the wilderness not merely as an escape, but as a nurturing environment and source of strength, an affirmation of independence that empowers individuals and offers spiritual and physical salvation.

He was a guardian against any boundary that restrained liberty and any new control that threatened individual freedom. The answer to society's problems is more freedom, not less. This was the message he gave in countless speeches to citizens, not just the legal and academic world.

As a sitting Supreme Court Justice, no one in the nation brought such a high profile to these issues. His life stands as a record of courage to hold fast against the forces that would exploit or erode these precious American ideals.

## Scope of Project & Goal

William O. Douglas (1898-1980) is a product of the West, growing up in and around Yakima, Washington and attending Whitman College in Walla Walla before heading east to law school at Columbia in New York City. He briefly returned to Yakima to practice law before accepting a teaching position at Columbia and later at Yale.

The President named him the third chair of the Securities and Exchange Commission from 1937-1939. Later FDR seriously considered Douglas as a candidate for Vice President.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt appointed Douglas to the U.S. Supreme Court on March 20, 1939 and he remained a Justice until he retired in 1975. At 40 he was the youngest Justice ever confirmed by the US Senate. His 36 year service is the longer than any other Justice in the Court's history. He wrote more opinions and dissenting opinions, gave more speeches, and authored more books than any other Justice. Douglas also holds the record for having the most wives (four) and the most divorces (three) while on the bench. The four attempts to impeach him were more than have been made on any other Justice. Of the 111 Supreme Court Justices to date, Douglas is one of only ten from the Rockies or West and the only member to serve from the Pacific Northwest. He was undeniably a powerful and controversial figure in U.S. history.

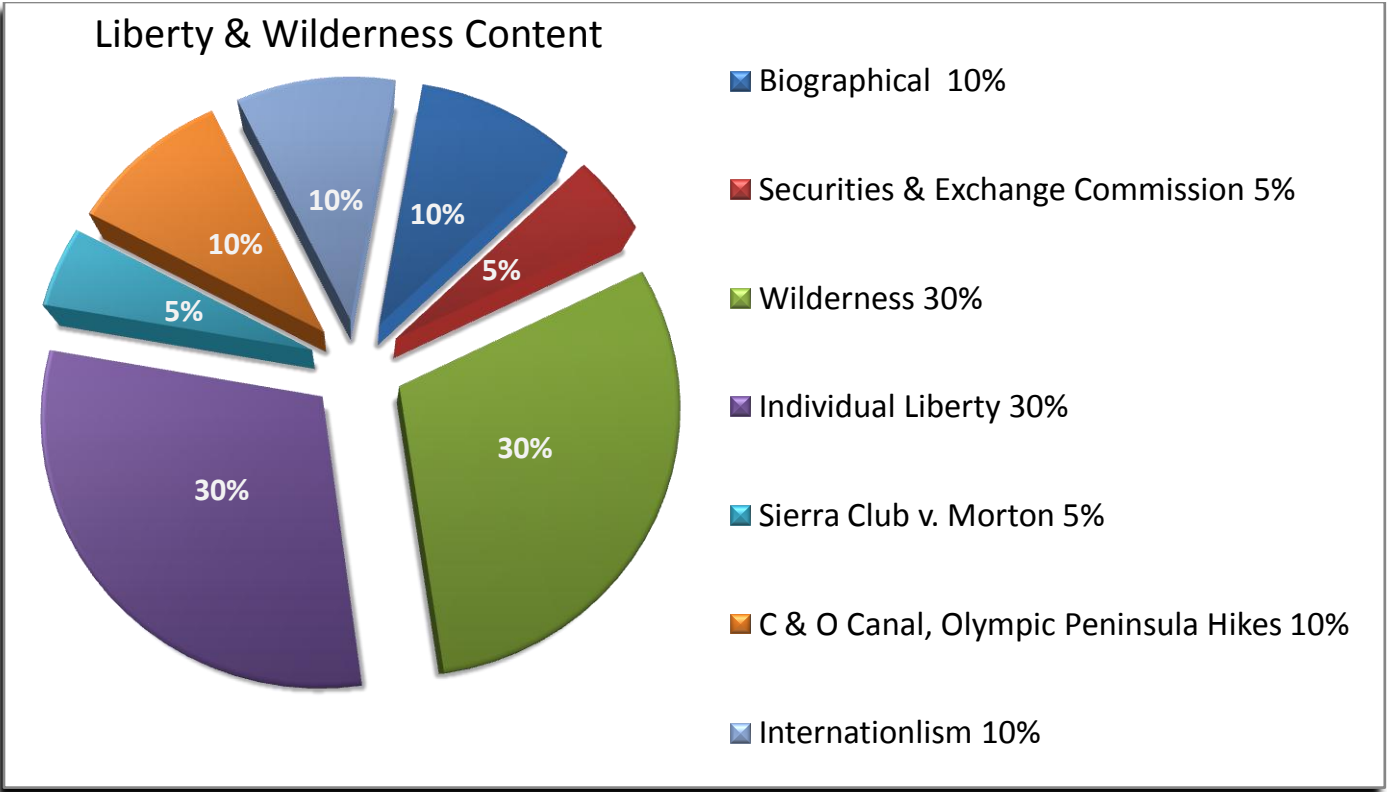
The primary objective of this project is to produce a 55-minute documentary film weaving Justice Douglas' life and writings in the context of wilderness and its importance to the human condition. His formative role in the conservation and environmental movement and its relationship to individual freedoms will be the fundamental theme of this project. His judicial legacy and his personal ties to the wilderness will be woven through a narrative of his writing and footage of him both in interviews and out in nature. Archival video, in particular a 1972 Eric Sevareid interview filmed on location at his western residence in Goose Prairie, Washington, will be a key element. The Douglas collection at the Yakima Valley Museum will play a considerable role as well.

In addition, new video will be shot to bring his written words to life. Interviews with contemporary legal, political and academic figures and wilderness advocates will further shape the content of the film. His legal accomplishments can be charted in this context, in particular his categorical defense of individual liberties and fundamental privacy rights. *Two exhaustive biographies have been written about Douglas totaling twelve-hundred pages of text with only a few dozen of these pages devoted exclusively to his legal and personal relationship with the natural world.*

This is a story with a national footprint and issues that radiate far beyond U.S. borders. The wilderness ethic and protection of wild lands have become defining issues across the planet. Douglas' role in shaping the modern environmental movement and his rich career as a writer, advocate for and devotee of the wilderness will be brought to life in this documentary.

Printed on recycled paper

Oregon Cultural Heritage Commission John Concillo - Producer 503-781-1622 [williamdouglasfilm@gmail.com](mailto:williamdouglasfilm@gmail.com)



**Archival Content Sources**

Yakima Valley Museum

News footage - National Networks; CBS, NBC & ABC

Library of Congress

Douglas Family Materials

National Park Service

Mike Wallace interview 1958

Howard Langer Interviews 1957

Eric Sevareid interview 1972 - on location at Goose Prairie, Washington residence

Oregon Historical Society

Washington State Historical Society

C-Span Video Archives

Printed on recycled paper