

# Wilderness Protocol

By KI5LNM

Wilderness Protocol is a phrase that we can hear and some of us who are new may have an inkling of what it means, but no more than an inkling. Tonight, I will go into detail about what it is for myself and others who may be helped.

The idea of the Wilderness Protocol began with William Alsup, N6XMW in Oakland, California. He wrote an article for QST magazine in 1994. His article suggested a Wilderness Protocol "For effective simplex use of handheld VHF and FM transceivers in the back country". Just six months later QST reported the enthusiastic support of the idea and so it was spread about among radio operators.

The Wilderness Protocol is now part of the ARRL ARES Emergency Resources Manual and states: "The Wilderness protocol (see page 101, August 1995 QST) calls for hams in the wilderness to announce their presence on, and to monitor, the national calling frequencies for five minutes beginning at the top of the hour, every three hours from 7 AM to 7 PM while in the back country. A ham in a remote location may be able to relay emergency information through another wilderness ham who has better access to a repeater. National calling frequencies are primary 146.520, and secondary 52.525, 223.50, 446.00, 1294.50 MHz."

What this becomes is a dedicated effort to supply communication to areas that cannot reach normal repeaters.

The idea of the Wilderness Protocol is that HAMs monitor simplex in areas where repeaters are hard to reach or impossible. But one thing to remember is that although it was created for people that were backpacking and may come to trouble or in the far reaches from civilization, it is not something that should be ignored in more populated areas and where repeaters are more readily reached.

It is recommended to monitor 146.520 as the primary frequency. Then the other frequencies mentioned can be monitored on a rotation if desired. One should listen every three hours between 7am and 7pm at the top of the hour for anyone who may be calling for help. You may ask if anyone needs help around the four-minute mark. Also, if you have the battery power to do it, it is a good idea to start monitoring 5 minutes before the hour to take into account the different settings of people's watches. Then if you make contact with someone who needs help, it is a good idea to move to a different frequency, such as 146.55 or 146.43, so that the primary frequency is open to new traffic.

One last suggestion is to use the LONG TONE ZERO. Begin calls for assistance with about 10 seconds of TONE with the LiTZ signal. Do this by keying up and holding down the zero key to continuously transmit the zero DTMF tone (hence: LONG TONE ZERO). Then proceed to make your emergency call. This would help those listening recognize that an emergency or priority call is coming through.

For me this part is all Chinese. So I looked up what that means. Most HTs today have a keypad on them and the "0" key is the one used. You transmit a DTMF (Dual Tone Multi Frequency) "0" for at least 3 seconds. There are emergency stations that have monitoring equip to pick up this DTMF "0". But within the Wilderness Protocol, someone monitoring the simplex may hear that tone and know someone is in trouble and listen for them to start talking.

One thing to remember first is: For the Wilderness Protocol to work there is the need for radio operators to be listening for calls. If no one is listening then there will be no one to help.

Some have found monitoring the 146.520 while traveling a good idea. People going cross country and RVers with radios have found it a good place to get help when they have needed it. You don't need to be in the wilderness to find the protocol helpful.

So my last bit would be that even though we have repeaters near us it is a good habit to start now and monitor the frequencies. Then if our repeaters do go down in an event, or we are somewhere traveling, we could help someone who is in need, and when that happens, we will already have the practice, and be ready to help.