

WORDS OF *the* WILD

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Newsletter of the Sierra Club's California/Nevada Wilderness Committee

A Monumental Masterpiece Triple Crown of new California Desert National Monuments

On February 12 President Barack Obama proclaimed three new national monuments in the California desert--the Mojave Trails, the Sand to Snow, and the Castle Mountains.

Make no mistake: this is a **BIG DEAL**. With one stroke of his pen, the president nearly doubled the amount of land he had similarly protected from development under the administrative authority granted him by the 1906 Antiquities Act.

Mojave Trails National Monument, by far the largest of the three, encompasses approximately 1.6 million acres south of Mojave National Preserve extending eastward to the Old Woman Mountains and Chemehuevi Wildernesses, and south to the Sheephole Wilderness just north of Joshua Tree National Park. At its heart the monument protects the area of the "Mother Road"—Route 66 between Ludlow and Needles--from future industrial development proposals. The Sand to Snow Monument, of 154,000 acres, is north of Interstate 10 near Palm Springs, north of Idlewild and south of Big Bear, west of Yucca Valley. The 20,920-acre Castle Mountains National Monument is the only one of the three that was NOT a monument in Senator Dianne Feinstein's recent desert legislation; it appeared there as an addition to Mojave National Preserve—due to the closure of a previously operating mine that had not been included in the original Preserve in 1994. However, because only Congress

can delineate boundaries of a national park or preserve, not the president, the senator included it as a monument in her request to the President last August to use his administrative authority to preserve these lands--because Congress had failed to act. The National Park Service is to manage this new monument.

Following up on her request to the President, Sen. Feinstein hosted a large meeting in October at Whitewater Preserve north of Palm Springs--to demonstrate public support for the requested monuments. (see WOW, Dec. 2015) Ever since then, activists had been assured that presidential action was imminent. Would he act before our winter Sierra Club wilderness and desert meeting in Shoshone, CA -- so that we could turn the February 13-14 event into a big celebration? He did! Just before!

The proclamation came on Friday, February 12 -- making use of President Obama's presence in southern California for an unrelated meeting. This timing was ideal for our Shoshone gathering!

Here are a few excerpts from

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the three separate proclamations:

Presidential Proclamation -- Establishment of the Mojave Trails National Monument

The Mojave Trails area of southern California is a stunning mosaic of rugged



mountain ranges, ancient lava flows, and spectacular sand dunes. It is a landscape defined by scarcity and shaped by travel. The area exemplifies the remarkable ecology of the Mojave Desert, where the hearty insistence of life is scratched out from unrelenting heat and dryness. This punishing environment has also forged the unique human history of the area, from ancient settlements uprooted by a changing climate to the armies of General George S. Patton, Jr., as they trained for battle in North Africa. With historic American trading routes, trails followed by Spanish explorers, a transcontinental rail line, and the Nation's most famous highway, the Mojave Trails area tells the American story of exploration, migration, and commerce.... This unique landscape contains a stunning diversity of lava flows, mountains, playas, sand dunes, bajadas, washes, and other features.... Amboy Crater, designated as a National Natural Landmark in 1973, has been the focus of research on a number of volcanic phenomena. The Pisgah Volcano lava flow's vast network of lava tubes constitutes southern California's highest density of caves, and is used by both speleologists and recreational cavers.... The area's scarce springs -- *continued page 2*

Monumental Masterpiece -- from page 1

and riparian areas such as Afton Canyon, Chuckwalla Spring, Hummingbird Spring, Barrel Spring, and Fenner Spring provide refuges for a wide variety of plants and animals. The area contains some of the Mojave Desert's best habitat for the threatened desert tortoise and provides important dispersal corridors for that fragile species.

The archeological record tells of a human existence shaped by a changing climate. During the Paleo-Indian period, now-dry lakes provided fresh water to small groups of nomadic people and the animals they hunted. The Mojave people left their mark on the landscape through petroglyphs, pictographs, old trails, and stone work....

A modest dirt road -- an original trackside component of the railroad project -- would later become the most famous highway in America. In 1911, in the infancy of the automobile era, the County of San Bernardino paved the first stretch of that road from Barstow to Needles. The next year, this stretch became part of the National Old Trails Road, which extended more than 3,000 miles from New York, New York, to Los Angeles, California, and connected the American coasts by pavement for the first time. In 1926, the road was officially designated as U.S. Highway 66... soon known around the world as Route 66. The Mojave Trails area contains the longest remaining undeveloped stretch of Route 66, offering spectacular and serene desert vistas and a glimpse into what travelers experienced during the peak of the route's popularity in mid-20th century. Today, the ghost towns along this stretch of Route 66 are a visual legacy of how the automobile shaped the American landscape....

The protection of the Mojave Trails area will preserve its cultural, prehistoric, and historic legacy and maintain its diverse array of natural and scientific resources, ensuring that the prehistoric, historic, and scientific values remain for the benefit of all Americans.

Presidential Proclamation -- Establishment of the Sand to Snow National Monument

The Sand to Snow area of southern California is an ecological and cultural treasure, a microcosm of the great geographic diversity of the region. Rising from the floor of the Sonoran Desert to the

tallest peak in southern California, the area features a remarkable diversity of plant and animal species. The area includes a portion of the San Bernardino National Forest and connects this area with Joshua Tree National Park to the east, knitting together a mosaic of spectacular landscapes stretching over 200 miles. The mountain peaks of the Sand to Snow area frame the northeastern reach of Coachella Valley along with the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument to the south. Home to desert oases at Big Morongo Canyon and Whitewater Canyon, the area serves as a refuge for desert dwelling animals and a stopover for migrating birds.... The Sand to Snow area encompasses a... nearly 10,000-foot elevation gradient from the Sonoran Desert floor to the top of the 11,500-foot San Geronio Mountain, the highest mountain in southern California. From the flat desert lowlands, the mountains thrust upward in stark relief, creating indelible beauty along with a diversity of resources and a rich history of human habitation and movement.

The San Bernardino Mountains and Big Morongo Canyon contain ancient rocks from the Proterozoic Eon, along with some of the oldest exposed rocks in California, nearly 2 billion years old. Granite, gneiss, and schist in these areas have been used by geologists to better understand the tectonic history of the region. The Sand to Snow area includes an extraordinarily diverse range of ecosystems from lowland deserts, fresh water marshes, and Mojave riparian forests, to creosote bush scrub ecosystems, and alpine peaks....

The protection of the Sand to Snow area will preserve its cultural, prehistoric, and historic legacy and maintain its diverse array of natural and scientific resources, ensuring that the historic and scientific values of this area remain for the benefit of all Americans.

Presidential Proclamation -- Establishment of the Castle Mountains National Monument

The Castle Mountains area, bounded on three sides by Mojave National Preserve (Preserve), possesses outstanding natural, cultural, and historical values representing some of the finest characteristics of the eastern Mojave Desert. It connects water flow and wildlife corridors of the Preserve,

and completes the boundary of the Preserve along the California-Nevada border. Beneath the shadow of Hart Peak lie rich cultural and historic resources, including Native American archeological sites and the historic gold mining ghost town of Hart. Exposed geologic features contribute to the outstanding scenery.



photo: Riverside Press Enterprise by Kurt Miller

Castle Peaks in Castle Mountains National Monument

Shaped by millions of years of geologic forces, the rugged Castle Mountains are emblematic of the Mojave landscape. The Castle Mountains rise from the broad sweep of the Lanfair Valley to over 5,000 feet, presenting a picturesque skyline... The remoteness of the Castle Mountains area offers visitors the chance to experience the solitude of the desert and increasingly rare natural soundscapes and dark night skies.

The area provides a critical linkage for plants, animals, and water between two mountain ranges within the Preserve, the New York Mountains to the northwest and the Piute Mountains to the southeast. The area's high quality desert habitat includes some of the finest Joshua tree forest in the Mojave Desert, as well as pinyon pine and juniper forest at the upper elevations.

With its habitat linkages, wildlife corridors, and intact ecosystems, the area offers exceptional opportunities to study plant and animal movement and connections between diverse natural systems, especially in the context of climate change.... Some of the best-preserved segments of a wagon road that linked the Arizona Territory ... to settlements in southern California can be found in the Castle Mountains area.

So—go out and celebrate—enjoy our newly protected desert areas. These new national monuments link previously protected places to give us a remarkable swath of connected habitat in our desert. ♪ (VNH)

Come visit Nevada's wild areas!

-- by Marge Sill

If you are tired of regulations and rules and the large numbers of people to be found in some of California's spectacular wilderness areas, you are invited to come and visit Nevada's wild areas.

There, on our vastly extensive federal public lands, you can camp anywhere you want and feel totally free and part of the landscape. You may hear no sounds except the call of the coyote or the hoot of the owl at night. You may see no people except your companions.

Nevada had only one wilderness area, the Jarbidge, which was established by the Wilderness Act in 1964, until fifteen Forest Service areas were added in December of 1989. After that 25 years of wilderness drought, Nevada now has 73 designated wildernesses and many more wilderness study areas, roadless areas, and lands with wilderness characteristics. However, unless it is hunting season, the only areas that get much visitation are Mt. Rose near Reno, the Ruby Mountains, and the federal lands near Las Vegas, including Mt. Charleston and Red Rock Canyon.

This year is an excellent year to visit the wild areas of Northern and Eastern Nevada because there has been good snowfall which means that the streams and lakes will have water in the summer.

One special landmark event this year in Nevada will be the 30th anniversary of Great Basin National Park—established in 1986. You may wish to come help us celebrate.

If you plan a Nevada visit, first access Friends of Nevada Wilderness website [<http://www.nevadawilderness.org/>] and read the sections on "Wild Areas in Nevada" [http://www.nevadawilderness.org/by_area_region] and then look at the list of Designated Wilderness to find details including directions to trail heads, maps, and a description of the area including wildlife and special features. You may need a four-wheel drive to access some areas, but many can be reached

in a good high clearance vehicle with good tires. You'll need water and food and a warm sleeping bag, because when it is 80 degrees under a bluebird sky at 2 p.m., it may be 30 degrees under the milky way at 5 a.m.

We Wild Nevada activists invite you to come and visit our wonderful wilderness. ☺



Distant views abound in eastern Nevada wilderness: Becky Peak, Schell Creek Range

photo: Marge Hoover

BLM Makes Basin and Range National Monument Envisioning Questionnaire Available

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) invites members of the public to share their thoughts on how the new Basin and Range National Monument should be managed, by completing and submitting an "envisioning" questionnaire, available at <http://on.doi.gov/1R15Ygk>.

"We're asking people to share with us those areas they find special and what needs to be done to keep them intact [or] if there are areas that need improvement," Monument Manager Alicia Styles said. Envisioning is a preliminary planning step that helps to ascertain resource values for the planning area.

The proclamation designating the Monument, signed July 10, 2015, directs BLM to complete the land-use planning process within three years of the designation.

As the proclamation indicates, the President established the Monument to "preserve its cultural, prehistoric, and historic legacy and maintain its diverse array of natural and scientific resources...." The proclamation identifies objects and values of substantial cultural and ecological importance, describing them as an "unbroken expanse [that] is an invaluable treasure for our Nation and will continue to serve as an irreplaceable resource for archaeologists, historians and ecologists for generations to come."

Respondents may submit completed questionnaires to the BLM Ely District Office, 702 North Industrial Way, Ely, NV 89301 or the BLM Caliente Field

Office, PO Box 237, Caliente, NV 89008.

The questionnaire may be submitted electronically at blm_nv_basin_range@blm.gov.

For more information about the Basin and Range National Monument go to <http://on.doi.gov/1LT79wP> or call the Caliente Field Office at (775)726-8100.

BLM contact is: Chris Hanefeld, (775) 289-1842; chanefel@blm.gov.

Some, but far from all, questions on the questionnaire are:

****What does the Monument mean to you? What do you hope to experience in the Monument? What makes... places in the Monument special to you?**

****What would you like to see addressed in the plan and/or maintained as status quo (please be specific)?**

****What actions do you consider necessary to protect and/or restore the historical and cultural significance of these lands-- and/or restore the unique natural and scientific resources?**

****Cultural Resources:** To what extent should BLM seek to enhance the condition of historical properties (as opposed to maintaining them in their current condition)?

****Land Art Work City:** City is currently not open to the public. Given the opportunity, would you visit City?

There are also questions on visual resources, recreation, fire, wild horse management, etc. ☺

(From a March 31 press release from the Bureau of Land Management's Ely District. See also WOW, April & Aug. 2015.)

Potential New Wilderness in the Sierra National Forest

-- by Chip Ashley

We came from the wild and we must remember where we came from and set aside wild places where we can find ourselves again when we get lost in the mad rush of the modern world. In *Wilderness and the American Mind*, Roderick Nash points out: "Thoreau believed that to the extent a culture, or an individual, lost contact with wildness he became weak and dull." (4th Ed. '88) Since wildness lives deep inside each of us, if we lose touch with the wild and wild places, we lose touch with ourselves.

It is essential to set aside wilderness areas precluded from development or commercial use. Yet, in the current planning cycle (started in 2012) for the Sierra National Forest, the Forest Service has limited consideration for new wilderness to only two areas. According to the agency's "Wilderness Inventory and Evaluation of May 2015," these two, both additions to existing wilderness areas, are the Monarch Addition and Ansel Adams Addition.

This is two out of 17 areas identified as potential wilderness on the Sierra NF inventory map published Aug. 29, 2014. The Sierra is the national forest just south of Yosemite National Park and extends generally as far south as the Kings River; the Sequoia is the next national forest to the south of that. The Sierra Forest's initial inventory included several areas that were probably too small or eliminated for other good reasons, but all the following areas are highly eligible and deserve to be recommended for wilderness.

- Cats Head
- Devils Gulch Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA)
- Dinkey Lakes Wilderness additions
- John Muir Wilderness additions
- Kaiser Wilderness additions
- Monarch Wilderness Addition
- Raymond Mountain IRA
- Shuteye IRA
- Soaproot
- Sycamore Springs

The Forest Service's dismissal of these areas from wilderness consideration means we citizen advocates need to

increase the pressure for more areas.

Because traditionally wilderness has been restricted almost exclusively to upper montane and alpine areas, largely because they are difficult to access and therefore of little interest for exploitation, I'll focus on three lower elevation areas that are relatively little-known—Cats Head, Soaproot, and Sycamore Springs.

The Soaproot Wilderness

Eligible Area (WEA) is next door to where I spent much of my teen years in the southern Sierra, in eastern Fresno County a



photo: Chip Ashley

Soaproot WEA: Dome, Blue Canyon tonalite

few miles south of Shaver Lake. I walked many miles from our cabin to explore the trails, granite domes, and stands of ponderosa pine and black oak. One unique feature is a trout stream, Rush Creek, with a remote 100-foot waterfall below a granite-cased pool and a superb view of the foothills and the San Joaquin Valley. The pool is ideal for summer swimming. I learned firsthand from the gray squirrels and Steller's jays and trout in the crystal pools about the idea that "in wildness is the preservation of the world" -- long before I actually read Thoreau's words. These wanderings in solitude gave me self-confidence and perspective on the meaning of civilization.

Soaproot was eliminated because it has been logged and contains past logging roads. Nevertheless, it is a wild area that meets the requirements of the Wilderness Act. The Act allows for exceptions "if alterations are not major and natural processes can largely be restored after designation. Generally, the natural condition criterion is met if the works of humans are substantially unnoticeable in the unit as a whole." (US Fish and Wildlife

Service, "Minimum Criteria for Wilderness.")

The "alterations" to Soaproot are superficial and can be restored. Indeed, as part of the Dinkey Landscape Restoration Project implemented under the Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009, much of the restoration work has already been done, so that the forest is close to what it was before the era of fire suppression and timber management. Soaproot does have "outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation" and "ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value."

Cat's Head Mountain WEA

of approximately 10,500 acres includes both sides of lower Big Creek, just north of Pine Flat Reservoir (Kings River) and, according to Sierra Forest Legacy, features "something that is quite rare in the Sierra Nevada: a low-elevation roadless area on public land. The WEA ranges in elevation from 3,460 feet atop Cat's Head Mountain to 1,124 feet near Sycamore Creek. The area's rugged slopes are covered with oak woodlands, grasslands and chaparral, with small groves of cedar and ponderosa pine in shaded pockets. Low elevation and ample forage make the area important winter deer habitat.

"Deep Creek dominates the central portion of the area, and despite its seasonal nature, pools of water can be found in the canyon year-round. It offers suitable habitat for bald eagle, California condor, California spotted owl, Cooper's hawk, Farnsworth's jewel-flower, Pacific fisher, Fresno ceanothus, and other species of interest The WEA contains the popular Deep Creek Trail and Bobs Flat Trail—available even when higher elevation trails are covered in snow."

Sycamore Springs WEA

includes both sides of lower Dinkey Creek between Ross Crossing and Balch Camp. (Dinkey Creek is a potential wild and scenic river under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.) Dinkey Creek runs through this WEA, which is bounded -- continued page 5

Sierra National Forest potential wilderness

-- from page 4

roughly by the Blackrock Road on the southeast, Ross Crossing Road and the Helms-Gregg transmission line on the north, the Ross Crossing Road on the west, and the Sycamore Springs Road on the south. On the west, it nearly touches the Cats Head Mountain WEA. Elevation drops from a little over 4200 feet at Ross Crossing to about 1500 feet on Dinkey Creek just above Balch Camp. The terrain is mostly steep and rugged canyon country, with lots of chaparral, manzanita, ceanothus, canyon and interior live oak, blue oak, and bull pine, with sycamores along streams. Higher up, some old-growth stands of ponderosa pine are found.

In addition to areas that should be recommended for wilderness, the Sierra Forest has the Dinkey Creek Potential Wild & Scenic River. Friends of the River (friendsoftheriver.org) provides this description of Dinkey Creek: "From its sources in a series of alpine lakes high in the Dinkey Lakes Wilderness, the soon to be not-so-small stream known as Dinkey Creek flows 27 miles through rich forests and precipitous granite canyons, eventually to meet the North Fork Kings River in the oak-studded foothills of the Sierra Nevada. Dinkey Creek alternately offers some of the wildest and yet most accessible recreational opportunities in this magic mountain range. The upper creek is a popular trail route into the Dinkey Lakes Wilderness. Downstream, the creek flows past the granite splendor of Dinkey Dome through a canyon reached only by trail.

"The small summer community of Dinkey Creek along the middle segment of the creek is one of the most popular family recreation destinations in the Sierra. Generations of Californians have been introduced to the wonders of the creek at the City of Fresno Family Camp, public campgrounds and picnic areas operated by the Forest Service, and numerous vacation cabins. The El-O-Win Girl Scout Camp on the creek introduces more than 1,000 girls to the outdoors every year. The Dinkey Recreation Area is a popular beginning point for hikers, backpackers, rock climbers, swimmers, anglers, and equestrians.

Downstream of the recreation area, the creek again enters a rugged canyon, eventually flowing past the last road access at Ross Crossing. Below here, the creek carves its way through a remote trail-less canyon tumbling over bare granite slabs between vertical walls of rock. This segment is explored only by a few expert kayakers who challenge its class IV-V whitewater every spring. The creek also sustains a native wild trout fishery that attracts anglers from all over the region."

Dropping 7,000 feet through four separate plant communities, including old growth mixed conifer forest, Dinkey Creek provides excellent habitat for the sensitive California spotted owl and at least three rare plants.

Dinkey Creek and the Sycamore Springs WEA remain under threat of damming. PG&E conducted a study in the 1970s to dam a portion of Dinkey Creek to create hydroelectric power. For similar reasons as well as potential water storage, the Kings River Conservation District opposes Wild and Scenic status for Dinkey Creek. This is—from the engineer's perspective—an ideal location for hydroelectric generation because of the rapid drop in elevation — the very same reason the creek attracts canyoneers and kayakers. This threat will worsen as droughts increase with climate change, and fear builds around the lack of water for agriculture and municipal use.

Other potential Wilderness the agency should recommend:

Monarch Wilderness Addition (Sequoia & Sierra National Forests) – This 54,000-acre potential addition to the Monarch Wilderness encompasses the Kings River roadless area and a segment of the Kings Wild & Scenic River, as well as the unprotected 12-mile segment of the Kings downstream. The river is also a state-designated Wild Trout Stream. The Kings River has carved one of the deepest canyons in North America. Rich in biodiversity, this wild gorge rises from 1,000 feet elevation to more than 10,000 feet and is an important transition area from the higher Monarch Wilderness and Kings Canyon National Park down to the oak woodlands and grasslands of the western Sierra foothills. The large elevational gradient will facilitate climate change-induced



Cats Head Mountain WEA: Metamorphic boulder, Kings River ophiolite, along Deep Creek

photo: Chip Ashley

migration of species to higher elevations. The southern portion of the area supports giant sequoia groves. A National Recreation Trail follows the Kings River into the proposed wilderness.

Dinkey Lakes Wilderness

Addition (Sierra National Forest) – This 43,248-acre area was left out of the legislation that protected the Dinkey Lakes Wilderness in 1984, because much of it is separated from the existing Dinkey Lakes Wilderness by a narrow jeep trail corridor. Upper elevations offer lakes and meadows, while the lower elevations are clothed in mixed conifer forests. The entire area provides an important habitat connection between the Dinkey Lakes/John Muir Wilderness in the east and the Kaiser Wilderness to the west. Important geological values include the Dinkey Creek roof pendant – an area of ancient metamorphic and sedimentary rocks lying on top of the extruded Sierra granite.

Devil's Gulch (Sierra National Forest) – This 43,248-acre area encompasses the South Fork Merced Wild & Scenic River and Wild Trout Stream and stretches down to Highway 140 through the Merced Canyon below Yosemite. The South Fork Trail to Hite Cove is one of the top wildflower viewing trails in the Sierra Nevada foothills. The area supports a rare undisturbed example of old-growth Pacific ponderosa pine. Elevations range from 1,300 to nearly 7,000 feet, providing an important migration corridor between the Sierra foothills and Yosemite National Park. Bordering on Yosemite, its designation as wilderness would appreciably expand the Yosemite protected zone. (See Outings, p. 9, May 13-15.) ☞

(Chip Ashley, a friend of foothills and wildflowers, lives in the Sierra foothills in Tolhouse, east of Fresno.)

Why The Condor Trail in the Southern Los Padres?

-- by Chris Danch

The idea of a long-distance trail in the southern Los Padres National Forest started in the late 1990s with Alan Coles, who called it the Condor Wilderness Trail. Along with local forest historian Jim Blakley, I then expanded the concept into a through-hike trail spanning the entire Los Padres Forest, from the Los Angeles County line up to Carmel. Our proposed 421-mile long route passes through some spectacular, rugged and remote wild areas, going from sea level to 8000 ft. About 70 percent of the trail is in Wilderness, and along 30 miles of Wild & Scenic rivers. Recently, the first through-hiker hiked the entire trail route—although this is not well marked in places. The ultimate vision is to connect it with the Pacific Crest Trail, first at the southern end in the Angeles Forest over the I-5 and then in the Mt. Shasta area through creation of a “Coast Range Trail” north of the Condor Trail.

The Condor Trail is included in Rep. Lois Capps’ Central Coast Heritage Protection Act, which, if passed, would result in the Condor Trail’s being a congressionally designated National Recreational Trail.

I am often asked, why develop the Condor Trail? I usually respond

with a litany of practical reasons, including:

- To improve public access, particularly to our wilderness areas;
- To offer an outstanding recreational experience;
- To provide an effective vehicle and theme, a narrative if you will, to raise funds for trail planning, construction, restoration, and ongoing maintenance, and for key acquisitions.
- To educate future generations as to the critical natural resource that is the Los Padres National Forest and the need for its continuing protection.

Some practical benefits are not so obvious but nevertheless have the potential for significant positive impacts on our Forest. An example:

- The Condor Trail is, by necessity, a mechanism which facilitates creative and effective collaborations with other agencies, organizations and communities. The fundraising, trail planning, construction, maintenance, and use of the Condor Trail, involves and unifies a broad and diverse group of people, businesses, agencies, and organizations all working together toward a common goal of preserving our public land and biophysical resources for future generations. This potential as a unifying theme is already being demonstrated with the pending wilderness bill, as the Trail’s inclusion has

broadened the base of support for the bill as a whole.

However, for me there are also deeper reasons. One example: while I was giving a talk about the Condor Trail at the Hi Mountain Lookout for the Central Coast Bioneers Conference, and looking out over the slender, delicate thread of relatively undisturbed



landscape that is the Los Padres Forest, I was struck by this thought:

“For most of us living today, we grew up primarily in degraded landscapes. We don’t see the full potential of these landscapes. We don’t see the loss of habitat, biodiversity, wild landscapes and ecological integrity. We don’t see the encroachments, not just on the biophysical world, but on our psyches, our sense of wholeness and belonging. While we don’t see these losses specifically, many of us at least vaguely feel them. Time in the wilderness can restore our senses sufficiently to bring these feelings into awareness and focus and then give us the energy and devotion to act upon them. Wilderness has many important values, and I can’t think of a more important act for our collective future than the preservation and expansion of our wilderness areas. *Trails are critical as they are the means by which we access wilderness.*”

Ultimately, a trail is more than a physical path on the ground. It is a path to self-discovery, renewal and re-connecting ones body with the land. And, a long-distance trail is more than a means to traverse a wide range of landscapes. Such trails provide a sense of connectivity and continuity that is so often missing in our fragmented, disconnected world. Long-distance trails tie together the many diverse communities, both social and biological, that are part of, and adjacent to, such trails. It is at this deeper level of meaning that I understand the most important ‘why’ of the Condor Trail. ∞

(Chris Danch <Chris@CondorTrail.com> is a director of the Condor Trail Association, based in Goleta, CA For more information see www.condortrail.com.)



Engaging in the Yosemite Wilderness Planning Process

— An Invitation to the public to get involved

-- by Bob Turner

January 20th was a cold day in Yosemite Valley, with the deep blue sky outlining a snow-encrusted Half Dome. The roads were clear, but the Village parking lot had not been plowed. The tow truck of the concessioner company, Delaware North, made the rounds all day long helping folks get moving again from their icy parking lanes. When I left I managed to maneuver out on my own with the careful use of low gear.

I was in Yosemite Village for a public meeting with National Park Service planning staff to discuss the onset of their revision of the Yosemite Wilderness Stewardship Plan. The last such plan was put into effect in 1989. This current effort is to review the management direction of that plan and update it as necessary to better align with contemporary use patterns and with National Park Service (NPS) policy. One notable difference is in the name. The 1989 plan was a “wilderness *management* plan,” while the new one will be a “wilderness *stewardship* plan,” recognizing that the ecosystems of the wild are at their best when left alone to strike their own natural balance. What needs “management” is less the wilderness itself than our human intrusions into the wilderness to enjoy its special values.

The new plan will apply to the 94 percent of Yosemite National Park that lies within the Yosemite Wilderness Area — 704,608 acres of land with the highest level of protection — land that is untrammeled, natural, and undeveloped, affording opportunities for solitude and primitive and unconfined recreation. This Wilderness Stewardship Plan seeks to provide a framework for measuring and monitoring such aspects of wilderness character, in order to ensure that, along with selected actions to be taken today, future management actions can be taken as needed to protect the wilderness from ongoing human

use and to adapt policies to changing conditions.

This Stewardship Plan is about the visitor, commercial, and administrative activities in the wilderness, with special focus upon visitor use patterns, methods of managing visitor use, techniques for trail design and construction, and concepts for managing stock within the wilderness setting. The plan is not about biomanagement strategy. Questions about how to deal with wildfires in the wilderness, eliminating non-native fish that prey on endangered frogs, transporting bighorn sheep to extend their range, or the resilience of ecosystems in the face of climate change are subjects for a separate Resources Management Plan.

Public input via meetings and written comment

Meetings had already been held online by webinar, as well as an in-person meeting by park planning staff with interested citizens at REI in Berkeley. There were only about twenty or so guests at the midweek hearing in Yosemite Village, reflecting the difficulty, even for those of us who are retired or have a flexible work schedule, to attend a meeting far from home. When Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks staff worked through their wilderness planning process, they held regular public meetings in Visalia for Central Valley citizens.

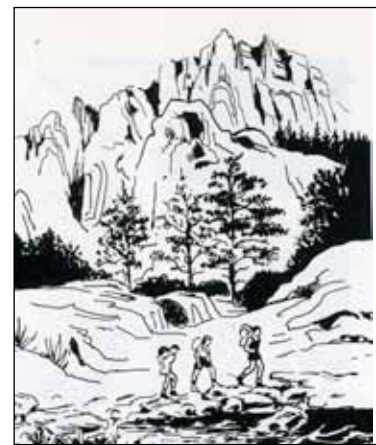
The Park staff wants to hear from those who care about the Yosemite Wilderness — wherever they live — and who have their own thoughts, concerns, and vision for how we should interact with it. They solicit public input to help guide the planning team in developing the revised plan. Although the comment period for initial Public Scoping closed on January 29, there will be at least two more formal opportunities for public comment: (1) the public review of preliminary alternatives, and (2) the release of the draft plan and environmental analysis. You will be able to submit written comments by letter or email, but keep in mind that every

public comment gets preserved in the final report, so you can facilitate the work involved in processing and documenting public input by utilizing the Park Service’s Planning, Environment & Public Comment (PEPC) website at www.parkplanning.nps.gov to send in your comments.

I was told that the wilderness Stewardship Planning team will look to the finished Merced and Tuolumne Wild and Scenic River Comprehensive Management Plans for guidance, making every effort to integrate the new wilderness plan with them.

Alternative Use Patterns at next stage of public input

When the comment period opens again, there will be a range of alternative use patterns written up for consideration, from increasing the number of visitors that are allowed daily into the wilderness (which



usually entails stricter regulations to control visitor impact) to the opposite extreme of tightening entry quotas (which enhances the qualities of solitude and silence, but for only the few able to secure visitor permits), and there will be a status quo alternative, as well. If the recent Sequoia and Kings Canyon NPs wilderness plan is a guide to what we may expect here, the Park Service will offer a preferred alternative that adheres fairly closely to the status quo on visitor use, while offering up particular changes and adjustments, such as trail decommissions, new

-- continued page 8

Yosemite Wilderness plan -- from p. 7

protections for fragile meadows and lakesides, campfire restrictions, and other site-specific regulations for habitat restoration.

Some trailhead quotas will be adjusted and certain camping areas may come under quota as well. And new considerations must be made for current trending trail uses such as fast “through-hiking”, geocaching, and trail running. Some seldom-used trails may be abandoned, while others may be restored and new ones constructed.

(Editor’s note? Do we support construction of new trails in Yosemite Wilderness? What are trails for: convenience of visitors or a concentration of use to protect the land?)

Levels of commercial stock use and commercially guided climbing may be curtailed if similar non-commercial activity reaches site capacity.

Some observers are calling the presence of the High Sierra Camps into question. While each camp lies within a non-wilderness island, supplying the camps by pack train impacts the wilderness trails. High Sierra Camps have been around since the 1920s and ’30s and so qualify for historical status and protection. They also provide a means for more elderly and less able visitors to enjoy the wilderness. Similarly, commercial outfitters provide an avenue into the wilderness for those less competent in backcountry skills.

Recommended Reading for informed Participants

For now, while one comment period is closed and another has yet to begin, I suggest people visit the PEPC website at www.parkplanning.nps.gov to get an overview of the process. The document page for Yosemite National Park lists 116 current park projects, from Comprehensive Management Plans for both the Merced and Tuolumne Rivers, through Resource Management Plans to remove trails, restore habitat, and preserve scenic vistas, to numerous specific repairs and capital improvements throughout the developed portions of the park. Go to parkplanning.nps.gov/ManagementPlans.cfm and scroll

Mokelumne River gets Interim Protection

-- by Eric Wesselman,

Gov. Jerry Brown in October 2015 signed AB 142 (Bigelow, R-O’Neals), which names 37 miles of the upper Mokelumne River as a potential addition to the state Wild and Scenic River system. The bill provides interim protections for the river while the state studies its suitability for permanent Wild and Scenic River protection. The bill passed the state Legislature on an overwhelming, bipartisan vote in September.

As passed by the Legislature and signed by the Governor, AB 142:

- Names the Mokelumne from Salt Spring Dam to Pardee Reservoir as a potential addition to the state Wild and Scenic River System.
- Calls for a state study to analyze water supply, climate change and other issues of concern to local

down to Yosemite. Here are ten separate Yosemite plans and reports with links to the complete documents as downloadable pdf files. This is a good time to study management plans already in effect to prepare for the next stage of developing a Wilderness Stewardship Plan.

Also recommended as an initial overview of the issues are the documents available at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/document.cfm?parkID=347&projectID=47112&documentID=69176>, which include a Yosemite Wilderness map, the texts of the Wilderness Act of 1964 and the 1984 California Wilderness Act that established the Yosemite Wilderness, the 1989 Wilderness Management Plan, and four fact sheets on commercial services, visitor use and capacity, stock use, and trails. Study these documents in the light of your own experiences traveling through the Yosemite back country, and begin to think about what issues are important to you and how the Park Service should address them. ∞

(Bob Turner is newsletter editor for the Tehipite Chapter; a version of this article appeared in the Chapter newsletter, “Tehipite Topics.”)

water purveyors, to be completed by the end of 2017.

- Requires that the study will provide for input from a broad range of stakeholders.
- Analyzes the effect of previous state Wild and Scenic designations on water rights applications and water rights granted after designation.
- Adds protections for the river, including a ban on construction of new dams and diversions on the river upstream of Pardee Reservoir and a ban on state funding for projects (with some exceptions), that could harm the free-flowing condition and natural character of the same river reaches. Those protections stay in place until the implementation of Wild and Scenic designation recommendations resulting from the study or the end of 2021, whichever occurs first.
- Requires local agencies to pay up to 50 percent of the study’s cost.

“The upper Mokelumne is a hard-working river that provides 90 percent of the water supply for the East Bay in most years,” said Steve Evans, Wild Rivers Consultant for Friends of the River. “AB 142 sets the stage for permanent protection of the remaining free-flowing segments of this beautiful river.”

AB 142 was a compromise among stakeholders concerned with river conservation and those focused on Mokelumne River water supply and power generation. It was supported by Amador and Calaveras counties, foothill water agencies, the East Bay Municipal Utility District, the California Farm Bureau Federation and PG&E in addition to river conservation, recreation and fish organizations. A full designation bill for the Mokelumne, SB 1199, after passing the state Senate, failed in the Legislature last year when foothill counties and water agencies complained about the lack of a state suitability study. ∞

(Eric Wesselman is Executive Director, Friends of the River, and former Sierra Club staff.)



Outings



Support wilderness the Sierra Club way!

--May your trails be crooked, winding, lonesome, dangerous, leading to the most amazing view. May your mountains rise into and above the clouds. -- Edward Abbey (from Range of Light Group newsletter)

April 30 - Sat

Fish Canyon to Piano Box Canyon

Join Community Hiking Club (Newhall/ Santa Clarita, CA) on *one of our best hikes* (moderate, 4 hrs.) This beautiful area contains 37 types of endangered species. Yellow-legged frog, arroyo toad and more. Bring camera. 8 mile total, out and back hike, to Piano Box. Fairly level—500 ft gain. The trail through Fish Canyon is interspersed with portions of the old cement road from the 1930s. We split off the main trail for the trail to Piano Box Canyon, beautiful wooded single track. Snack and rest in Piano Box with time to enjoy the reddish/ orange canyon walls. Carpool from Santa Clarita or meet at the white gate at 8 a.m. for 8:15 a.m. SHARP departure. Bring: Lunch, lots of water (2 - 3 liters), snacks, camera, hiking poles to help at water crossings. Contact leader Dianne Erskine-Hellrigel, Zuliebear@aol.com.

May 13-15 -- Fri - Sun

Merced Wild River and Devil Gulch Potential Wilderness

Join Friends of the River and CA Wilderness Coalition for family camping in BLM campground on Merced River below Yosemite. Hike downstream along river and see Merced River WSA threatened by proposed expansion of McClure reservoir; also hike Hite Cove Trail along South Fork Merced River into Devil Gulch potential Wilderness. Contact Steve Evans, sevans@friends oftheriver.org or call (916)708-3155.

May 27-30 – Fri - Mon

Memorial Day Nevada Wilderness Service trip

Join California/Nevada Wilderness Committee's annual service trip with wilderness staff of BLM's Ely District office; this year on Memorial Day weekend -- May 27 to 30 -- in the Weepah Spring Wilderness, at northern edge of Nevada's new Basin & Range National Monument, as we work once again with wilderness ranger John Miller. We plan a hike to Mt Irish--on south side of the Monument--with mini tour. Optional central

commissary, usual exorbitant fee. Contact Vicky Hoover at (415)977-5527 or vicky.hoover@sierraclub.org.

May 27-30 – Fri - Mon

Black Rock Rendezvous

This annual event makes a great first trip to the Black Rock; it typically includes speakers, guided tours, hot springs, rocket launches, rock hounding, a Dutch oven cook-off, drawings, and more. Cosponsored by Friends of the Black Rock, BLM and Friends of Nevada Wilderness. RVs and trailers OK. Primitive camping but w/ portable toilets. May be Kid's Camp hosted by NV Outdoor School. Bring your HAM radio. Dogs on leash; pick up after them. For more info go to: www.blackrockrendzvous.com. Questions/sign ups: David Book (775)843-6443 Great Basin Group/ CNRCC Desert Com.

June 19-25 – Sun - Sat

Escalante River Backpack

Enjoy the stunning landscape of southern Utah on this backpack along 27 miles of the Escalante River and 10 miles of deep and narrow Harris Wash. Side trips explore narrow canyons and creeks. Arrive at Escalante Interagency Visitor Center around noon MDT; then set up a car shuttle between Hwy 12 bridge and Harris Wash Trailhead. Bring daypack and footwear appropriate for water. David Hardy, (702) 875-4826, email preferred, hardyhikers@embarqmail.com. Southern Nevada Group/ CNRCC Desert Committee.



Turtles campsite

photo: Richard Stover

Wilderness Service Trip Report:

The CA/NV Wilderness Committee's annual service trip with wilderness staff of BLM Needles field office took place March 25-27 in the stark and scenic Turtle Mountains; we camped just outside the wilderness, at the north edge, and the group of a dozen enthusiasts pitched in and helped to mark

and improve a previously constructed trail leading around the dramatic "Mexican Hat" volcanic rock formation. BLM had built the trail after our group, on an earlier service trip, had walked through the



Giant ocotillo blooming in the Turtles

photo: Richard Stover

area to select the best route. It's still a good route, but the trail needed a bit extra work. The spring flowers, moon just past full, and a special last breakfast featuring Easter eggs were all trip highlights – as well as the unexpected participation of four young women working on five-months internship stints with the Needles office of BLM; they had a couple of different projects helping threatened plant species. Kate, Jessica, Rinnie, and Sasha come from different parts of the U.S., but they all were enthused about the desert--and about wilderness. ☞

photo: Richard Stover



Trail defining in the Turtles

Reauthorizing the Land & Water Conservation Fund -- a battling year

It has been a full year now that we've been trying to get the Land & Water Conservation Fund reauthorized.

What IS the Land & Water Conservation Fund (LWCF)?

Often billed as "America's most successful conservation program, it was signed into law by President Lyndon Johnson in 1964 – on the same day that he signed the Wilderness Act. Many assert that LWCF has had more influence on more Americans' ability to recreate outdoors than the Wilderness Act. Using income from royalties paid for offshore oil and gas leasing, the LWCF funds two main programs – direct federal acquisitions – usually of inholdings within parks, forests and other key federal conservation units—making them more effectively manageable, and second, the "Stateside" program whereby states, counties and communities get funding for local parks and other outdoor recreation facilities.

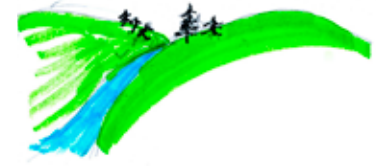
But – LWCF came with an expiration date, and we hoped Congress would reauthorize it before it expired last September 30. Alas, not so. The blatantly hostile chair of the House Natural Resources Committee, Utah's Rob Bishop, would not let the House reauthorization bill through his committee. He torpedoed the popular program. Senate leadership

also was unhelpful. But end-of year budget negotiations at least revived the LWCF with a three-year extension, till September 2018.

But our legislative champions are not satisfied with such meager pickings, and they (and we!) seek to build on the momentum of so many cosponsors of the bills for permanent reauthorization in both Houses of Congress – now 204 in the House and 43 in the Senate. To avoid another emergency scramble in 2018, we aim to boost the number of cosponsors even higher this year and win positive action.

In California the best way to help (since all of our Democratic reps are already cosponsors of HR 1814, and both our Senators already are cosponsors of S. 890), is to thank all current cosponsors and keep them engaged. We don't want them to think we are satisfied with three short years. We seek real, solid reauthorization. In Nevada, Rep. Dina Titus is also a valued cosponsor. No Republicans in these two states are likely cosponsors, although there is a generous sprinkling of Republican cosponsors, both House and Senate, from other states.

California has received approximately \$2.34 billion in LWCF funding (more than any other state) over the past five decades, protecting places



Helen Burke design

such as the Lake Tahoe Basin, California Desert, Point Reyes National Seashore, Headwaters Forest, the San Diego and Don Edwards National Wildlife Refuges, national forests of the Sierra Nevada--and much more.

In the stateside program, here are a very few varied samples:

In 2009, the Central Valley city of Livingston got \$160,500 for the Livingston Sports Complex;

In 2004, the City of Fresno got \$50,745 for Fulton Mall playground;

In 2008, the City of Carpinteria got \$214,000 for a Carpinteria Bluff acquisition;

In 2003, San Luis Obispo County got \$105,260 for Lopez Lake Recreation Area development;

In 1980, the City of Ripon in San Joaquin County got \$23,368 for Manley-Ripona Park;

In 1976, the City of Eureka got \$99,602 to develop Cooper Gulch Park.

For Nevada's White Pine County, in 1973, 1978, 1987, and 1994, the Nevada Division of State Parks got \$110,117, \$138,160, \$193,834, and \$17,280 for Cave Lake State Park facilities.

And so on--far, far more. See www.lwcfcoalition.org. ♪

WORDS OF the WILD

Co-Chair, newsletter editor: Vicky Hoover (415) 977-5527
 Co-Chair, Los Padres Chapt. coord: James Hines (805) 340-9266
 Vice Chair: George Barnes (650) 494-8895
 Judy Anderson (818) 248-0402: wilderness management
 Cassie Barr (510) 336-7022: San Fran. Bay Chapter coordinator
 Victoria Brandon (707) 994-1931: Redwood Chapter coordinator
 Joyce Burk (760) 252-3820: Southern CA forests
 Cindy Buxton (619) 934-0323: San Diego Chapter coordinator
 Alan Carlton (510) 769-3403: National Wildlands team liaison
 Sandra Cattell (661) 714-2850: Angeles Chapter coordinator
 Steve Evans (916) 442-3155: Wild & Scenic Rivers
 Steve Fernald (530) 577-5112; Tahoe area coordinator
 Joe Fontaine (661) 821-2055: Wilderness Watch, Kern Kaweah Ch.
 Cal French (805) 239-7338: Santa Lucia Chapter coordinator
 Terry Frewin (805) 966-3754: CA Desert areas
 Hermi Hiatt (702) 361-1171: Friends of Nevada Wilderness
 John Moore (916) 731-7153: Mother Lode Chapter coordinator
 Mike Painter: (415) 752-3911: Californians for Western Wilderness
 Par Rasmusson (702) 215-9119; Southern Nevada coordinator
 Marge Sill (775) 322-2867: Toiyabe Chapter coordinator
 Geoffrey Smith (858) 442-1425: List manager
 Graham Stafford (775) 686-8478: webmaster



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85 Second St., 2nd floor,
San Francisco CA 94105

FIRST CLASS

The Sierra Club's California/Nevada Wilderness Committee, an issue committee of the CA/NV Regional Conservation Committee, advocates for preservation of unroaded, undeveloped public lands in a wild state, through legislation and appropriate management, and sponsors stewardship and wilderness study outings.