



WORDS OF *the* WILD

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

Fate of Desert National Wildlife Refuge hangs in the balance

-- by Christian Gerlach



photo: Friends of Nevada Wilderness

The Desert National Wildlife Refuge dodged a proverbial bullet in July, but permanent protection--the only way to save it from the Air Force--is still not in sight. In a sneaky move in early July, the Air Force went around the Nevada delegation to Rep. Rob Bishop (UT) to get an amendment approved as part of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) that would give the military control of the western portion (840,000 acres) of the wildlife refuge.

The last few months have seen intense ups and downs on environmentalists' battle against potential military takeover of most of the Desert National Wildlife Refuge. On July 1, 2020, the House of Representatives Armed Services

Committee approved an amendment by Rep. Bishop to the National Defense Authorization Act.

With this amendment, Section 2845 of the legislation would have had disastrous implications for the huge Desert National Wildlife Refuge, effectively handing control of more than

800,000 acres of the Desert Refuge to the United States Air Force for military training and testing. There was NO consultation by the Committee with Congressman Steven Horsford (D-NV4) whose District includes the Desert Refuge, or anyone in the Nevada delegation.

Thanks in part to the outrage from people across Nevada, the Nevada delegation fought back hard. In a bipartisan protest, all four Nevada representatives sent a joint letter urging House leadership to protect the Desert Refuge. In Daniel Rothberg of the NV Independent's article, the representatives voice their displeasure with the amendment and the lack of consultation.

To quote from this article: "Last week, a Utah Republican offered a

surprise amendment during a hearing that put parts of the Air Force's plan back on the table. A Democrat-controlled House committee approved it. The move caught the delegation off-guard. "No one on my side knew the amendment was being introduced," Rep. Steven Horsford said.

"We weren't consulted at all," said Rep. Dina Titus. "It was a surprise to us."

"This move is totally unacceptable," Rep. Susie Lee said in a statement.

"We weren't involved in it at all," said Rep. Mark Amodei, the only Republican in the delegation.

Now some worry that a new "screw Nevada" deal is on the horizon if Congress moves forward with a proposed expansion opposed by the [state] Legislature in a nearly unanimous bipartisan vote."

A massive campaign -- continued page 2

Special Items to note in this issue:

TWO ACTION items for NOW:

**AB 3030--contact your state Senator: pp. 3-4

** Register now-- Wilderness Workshop: p.10

And :

** Victory: Great American Outdoors Act pp.3-4

** Vision: 30 x 30 campaign ahead: pp. 4-5

Also featured in this issue

Desert Refuge fate still at risk pp. 1-2

California wilderness bills in NDAA pp. 2-3

Esselen Tribe regains land p. 6

Conglomerate Mesa and K2 Gold p. 7

Solitude Canyon and NEPA p. 8

Outings p. 9

across the nation erupted to “Save the Desert Refuge”, and the media went wild. The Nevada delegation engaged *big time*, and a new amendment arose (the Horsford amendment) that got rid of the bad parts of the Bishop amendment and kept the good pieces. Through a complicated House Rules Committee process, on July 17 the Horsford amendment moved in a package to the House floor and was voted on and passed unanimously on July 20.

On July 9, Nevada Governor Steve Sisolak weighed in when he requested congressional leaders axe the last-minute provision snuck into the defense authorization bill. In a letter to Rep. Raúl Grijalva, chair of the House Natural Resources Committee, and Rep. Adam Smith, chair of the House Armed Services Committee, Governor Sisolak made it clear that this provision “clearly undermines Nevada’s ability to effectively manage wildlife and natural resources within our state borders.”

Thanks to Desert Refuge supporters in Nevada and across the country, our Nevada delegation was able, through some complex maneuvers, to replace the amendment with a much better one that passed through the House.

And -- the newest threat

But now the White House is threatening to veto the NDAA if the Nellis Test and Training Range in the Desert Refuge and the Fallon Range are not expanded according to the military demands. The next step will be the House and Senate Conference Committee, where the final resolution for both Desert Refuge and Fallon will be decided later this fall. We need Congress to hold strong against the veto threat and stop the military expansion into our precious refuge.

Sierra Club’s Our Wild America Campaign worked with Volunteer Fawn Douglas to mobilize the Moapa Band of Paiutes and the Las Vegas Band of Paiutes to have both Nations write opinion editorials calling on Nevada’s

Significant Wilderness Provisions Added to Defense bill

-- by Anne Henny

On July 21 the U.S. House of Representatives approved H.R. 6395, its version of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2021. HR 6395 authorizes \$733.7 billion for fiscal 2021 through 2025. While the bill principally funds military personnel and weapons systems, it also includes COVID response provisions, climate resiliency measures, \$1.5 billion for cleanup of toxic per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, or PFAS, on and around military bases, and requirements to remove names of Confederate generals from military installations.

It also contains significant wilderness and public lands provisions, in two amendments strongly promoted by Sierra Club. If signed into law with these amendments intact, the bill would add nearly 1.5 million acres in California, Colorado, and Washington state to the National Wilderness Preservation System and protect many hundreds of miles of creeks and rivers.

The amendments added to the NDAA include the texts of several bills: H.R. 2546, the Protecting America’s

Congressional Delegation, and the rest of Congress, to hold strong in the face of the Trump veto threat. To these indigenous people, it is a matter of fulfilling the United States’ and Congress’ duty to the treaty rights and acting as responsible, caring stewards of their ancestral lands, cultural sites, and religions. To the Southern Paiute People this means not letting the Air Force continue to damage their artifacts and places of deep cultural and historical significance.

Sources:

- [The Desert Refuge Faces Veto Threat by Shaaron Netherton on July 31, 2020](#)
- [Friends of Nevada Wilderness: “Save the Desert National Wildlife Refuge!” updated page. Last updated by Shaaron Netherton on July 08, 2020](#)

Wilderness (PAW) Act; H.R. 823, the Colorado Outdoor Recreation and Economy (CORE) Act; and H.R.1373, the Grand Canyon Centennial Act. In addition, as reported by Christian Gerlach in the previous article, it included the Horsford amendment for Nevada’s Desert National Wildlife Refuge, which struck language that would give the Air Force authority over most of the Desert Refuge.

The PAW Act designates almost 1.3 million acres of wilderness and more than 1,000 miles of Wild and Scenic Rivers in three states. Four important California bills are in the PAW Act (see WOW, Dec 2019, and descriptions here from a letter to Congress by Athan Manuel, Sierra Club Washington DC Lands Program Director):

Northwest California Wilderness, Recreation, and Working Forests Act: The forests of Northwest California contain some of the state’s largest intact stands of old-growth oaks, conifers, and redwood forests along with its only major undammed river, the Smith. [This bill] would...expand the economic and recreational opportunities with more than 261,000 acres of Wilderness, 379 miles of wild and scenic rivers, and critical habitat designations for endangered salmon and steelhead. [Originally 2019 legislation by Rep. Jared Huffman, D-CA2. ([HR 2250](#)).]

Central Coast Heritage Protection Act: California’s central coast encompasses some of North America’s most diverse landscapes and remains a key source for clean drinking water, wildlife habitat, and economic stimulus for nearby communities. The Central Coast Heritage Protection Act would secure lasting protections for two of its key landscapes, the Los Padres National Forest and Carrizo Plain. [Originally 2019 legislation Rep. Salud Carbajal, D-CA24. ([H.R. 2199](#)).]

San Gabriel Mountains Foothills and Rivers Protection Act: The San Gabriel Mountains are a community and ecological gem. Located just an hour’s drive north of downtown Los Angeles, the area serves as a critical wildlife corridor for southern California and is home to iconic species -- *continued page 3, bottom*

Congress passes the Great American Outdoors Act

LWCF fully funded and parks' maintenance boosted

What is great about the Great American Outdoors Act in addition to its name?

The name alone gives a tantalizing glimpse of greatness--because who would NOT want to celebrate, strengthen, cherish and cheer the Great American Outdoors? And the bill lives up to the promise of its name.

The Land and Water Conservation Fund Coalition calls this bill, passed by the House of Representatives on July 22 by 310 to 107, "the conservation legislation of a generation."

That strong House vote came just a month after the Senate passed the same bill 73 to 25; 25 republicans joined democrats to vote YEA.

The bill mandates full funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). This means that the full authorized amount of \$900 million per year will actually be used every year. Until

now, Appropriations Committees have almost never allowed anywhere near the full authorized amount to be appropriated, and thus the LWCF, often called "America's most successful conservation program", has not lived up to its true potential. (See WOW April & Dec 2018, April 2016, April & Dec 2015), But from now on--we can be assured of maximum

National Parks and Public Land Legacy Restoration Fund to provide federal land management agencies with \$9.5 billion to begin to address the \$22 billion horrendous deferred maintenance backlog on our public lands--principally on our national parks.

Of the LWCF's two main programs, one, called "**direct federal acquisition**" allows federal agencies to purchase private

land inholdings within national parks, forests, and wildlife refuges--thus simplifying and expediting management. The other program, known as "**State and local assistance**", grants states funds for local parks and other public outdoor recreation facilities, like community swimming pools, bike trails, golf courses, tennis courts, marinas, campgrounds, etc. Both programs will invest in our public lands and support conservation far into the future.



funding for the LWCF.

The bill also establishes the brand new

CA Wilderness bills in NDAA--from page 2

such as the Nelson's bighorn sheep, California condors, and more. Its watershed provides a third of L.A.'s drinking water. San Gabriel Mountains, in one of the most park-poor regions of the country, provide one of the few places Angeleños can enjoy the outdoors. [Originally 2019 legislation by Rep. Judy Chu, D-CA27. ([HR 2215](#)).]

Rim of the Valley Corridor

Preservation Act: To conserve critical wildlife habitat and bolster local access to the outdoors, the Rim of the Valley Corridor Preservation Act would expand the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area by roughly 191,000 acres to include sites ranging from the Santa Clarita Valley to Griffith Park. The National Park Service recommended adding the critical wildlife corridor to the

NRA after a 2010 special resource study of the "Rim of the Valley Corridor" followed thousands of public comments. [originally included in 2019 legislation by Rep. Adam Schiff, D-CA28, [H.R. 1708](#).]

Differences between the House and Senate versions of the FY2021 NDAA will need to be reconciled in a conference committee before it is sent to President Trump. But, a veto has been threatened.

So, before December, public lands advocates need to pressure Congress to:
**Keep the PAW and CORE public lands provisions in the NDAA, and
**Prevent any expansion of military bombing ranges in Nevada.

For more information, see:

<https://degette.house.gov/media-center/press-releases/house-approves-degette-wilderness-plan-as-part-of-annual-defense-bill>.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi in writing her constituents about the House passage for the Great American Outdoors Act, emphasized, "Some of California's most cherished natural areas have benefitted from the protection provided by the Land and Water Conservation Fund, including Joshua Tree, Lake Tahoe, the Golden Gate National Recreation Area, and the San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park....The LWCF also addresses environmental injustice by creating green spaces near low-income communities and communities of color across the country. Permanently funding the LWCF will ensure that we preserve our natural heritage in an equitable manner to ensure that all communities can benefit."

The Great American Outdoors Act becomes law

On August 4, at 8:14 a.m. California time, the president signed The Great

-- continued page 4, bottom

Reimagining Conservation with a 30 x 30 goal

-- by Jenny Binstock and Brandon Dawson,

We bring diverse backgrounds to our conservation work in California at the Sierra Club: a legal background with time spent working at the Department of Justice; an organizing and policy background focused on community climate resilience strategies. These perspectives inform our vision for a future conservation movement where lands, waters, wildlife and communities can thrive together. That's why we're energized by the Sierra Club's commitment to protecting 30 percent of our lands and waters by 2030.

The idea of a conservation and climate goal for our planet's survival originated in biologist E.O. Wilson's book *Half Earth: Our Planet's Fight for Life*. Wilson said that to avoid a global tipping point of mass extinction and irreversible climate change, we must set aside for Nature one half--50 percent--of Earth's land and water surface by 2050. Scientists globally say that to achieve this, governments must adopt intermediary goals of 30 percent protection by 2030. (WOW, Dec 2010, Aug & Dec 2019.)



A 30 x 30 strategy rests on four key pillars:

- 1) ensuring that large swaths of land are available to capture and store carbon;
- 2) connecting separate expanses of habitat to help wildlife migrate and adapt to changing ecosystems;
- 3) stopping fossil fuel extraction on public lands, and;
- 4) building a more expansive and inclusive conservation ethic that centers a commitment to equity and justice.

The first three of these pillars are work that Sierra Club has historically done, and we're currently strengthening our commitment to the fourth.

The history of public lands in the United States includes forced removal of Native peoples, treaty and human rights violations, and discrimination. Even the Sierra Club's own history is steeped in an idea of conservation that ignored and discounted the presence, practices, and connections of Indigenous inhabitants. A new report by the Hispanic Access Foundation and Center for

-- continued next page, p. 5

Great American Outdoors Act -from. p 3

America Outdoors Act into law — indoors--in a publicity event live-streamed from the East room of the White House, and attended by various republican lawmakers and other bureaucrats who applauded the 40 minutes of outrageous republican claims for conservation leadership that preceded the ten seconds of actual signing. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QrqlhJ-XRAA>

Now, truly, the new National Parks Legacy Restoration Fund will be of overwhelming benefit to the 27 financially strapped NPS sites in California whose maintenance backlog totals \$1,808,670,496. The individual units have deferred backlogs ranging from \$3,874 in the Port Chicago Naval Magazine National Memorial and \$201,104 for the César E Chávez National Monument to \$176,564,468 for Sequoia & Kings Canyon National Parks and Yosemite National Park's staggering amount of \$582,670,827. Nevada's two NPS areas, Great Basin National Park and Lake Mead National Recreation Area, have a combined total deferred maintenance backlog of \$222,991,305.

As Chris Morrill of the California

Wilderness Coalition pointed out, "LWCF money [is being used] to expand wilderness areas in the state, including a 2,995 acre addition to the Yuki Wilderness with the partial purchase of the Sanhedrin Ranch (still 4,000 acres left to go)."

Background for The Great American Outdoors Act

In early March this year Senators anxious to pass the LWCF bill devised the Great American Outdoors Act by combining two popular parks-funding bills that had each amassed plenty of bipartisan cosponsors in both their House and Senate versions. The LWCF bill, called "LWCF full and permanent funding" was S 1081 and HR 3195. The "Restore Our Parks" bill for funding parks maintenance backlogs was S 500 and HR 1225. Sierra Club volunteers in many states had helped build up the strong cosponsor totals for both. But, once the two bills were combined, the action moved to The Great American Outdoors Act. In early June, when the Senate scheduled its vote and a strong majority for passing became evident, this combined form appeared also in the

House--replacing the two separate bills.

An odd political twist expedited Senate passage. Two western Senators, from states where the LWCF is very popular, sought to use their championship for the LWCF to strengthen their lagging reelection campaigns. In March, they asked the President for help, and he famously tweeted, "What a fine job Cory Gardner and Steve Daines are doing on the Land & Water Conservation Fund; I hope the Senate passes it soon." Majority leader McConnell at once cosponsored the bill and scheduled it for a Senate vote; COVID-19 then delayed matters until June.

Senators who spoke out in favor of the bill during the Senate voting emphasized that, while this funding measure for both national and local community parks has always been "a good idea--it is now essential --with COVID-19 worries and current unrest over racism, as more and more people seek solace in Nature -- and, at the same time, more and more people need the new jobs this infrastructure funding measure will bring." ∞

-- by Vicky Hoover

What a 30 x 30 agenda could mean for California

(-- from previous page-p. 4)

American Progress titled “[The Nature Gap](#)” highlights profound inequities in access to and loss of nature in the U.S. Findings include that communities of color are three times more likely than white communities to live in places



with little or no access to nature, and that low-income communities of color experience the greatest losses from destruction of nature.

So the 30 x 30 strategy allows us not only to do the urgent work of connecting the climate and extinction crises, but also to address critical questions of who benefits from protecting nature and how we partner with and respect all communities in our efforts to do so.

And we have momentum. 30 x 30 has been adopted by many of our partners in the NGO world, by US Senators and Representatives, nearly every leading Democratic presidential candidate, and the U.N. Convention on Biodiversity, which is expected to endorse this goal at their gathering later in 2020. Both the Senate and House of Representatives have introduced 30 x 30 legislation in just the last year. (see box, this page.)

California 30 x 30 legislative action in AB 3030

In the California Legislature, Assemblymember Ash Kalra introduced Assembly bill 3030 this year. The bill would establish as state policy a goal to protect at least 30 percent of California’s land base and waters and 30 percent of the state’s coastal ocean waters by 2030. AB

3030 encourages California to reach this goal by protecting the state’s biodiversity and endangered species; increasing opportunities for climate resiliency and carbon sequestration through natural measures; promoting collaboration among federal government, local communities, Native American Tribes, and private landowners for conservation efforts; and enhancing public access to nature statewide, with an emphasis on increasing access for communities of color and economically disadvantaged communities.

AB 3030 is supported by more than 60 environmental justice, public health, and conservation groups and more than 200 scientists. The bill will be heard on August 12 in the Senate Natural Resources and Water Committee, and we encourage you to **call your State Senator and urge them to vote yes on this important bill.** To look up who your State Senator is, and also learn more about getting involved in Sierra Club California’s in-district lobbying program, visit: <https://www.sierraclub.org/california/district-advocacy>.

Sierra Club is excited to build a statewide 30 x 30 strategy here in California. Our ambition is that our national and Sacramento staff, our 13 chapters, our Grassroots Network teams, our more than 500,000 members and supporters in the state, and our many partners, can all be a part of forming a 30 x30 vision for California that is truly grassroots, inclusive, and contributes to a modern conservation ethic we can all be proud of.

Take our CA 30 x 30 survey to share your vision for what 30x30 could look like in your community at sc.org/CA_30x30.

(Jenny Binstock is Senior Campaign Representative, Sierra Club Lands Water Wildlife, and Brandon Dawson is Policy Advocate, Sierra Club California.)

Help get more support for 30 x 30 resolutions in Congress

Two resolutions have been introduced--both by legislators from New Mexico-- S. Res. 372 in the Senate; H. Res. 835 in the House.

Although such resolutions, if passed, do not have the force of law, both resolutions: **“Express the sense of the [House of Representatives/ Senate] that the Federal Government should establish a national goal of conserving at least 30 percent of the land and ocean of the United States by 2030.”**

That is powerful. These resolutions need more cosponsors! Both California Senators are among the 12 current cosponsors of S. Res. 372 (and deserve thanks) but so far ONLY FOUR of California’s representatives are among the 17 cosponsors of H. Res. 835:

Rep. Khanna, Ro [D-CA-17]
Rep. Lieu, Ted [D-CA-33]
Rep. Lowenthal, Alan S. [D-CA-47]
Rep. Napolitano, Grace F. [D-CA-32]

Please thank these four legislators, but this leaves us with MANY potential additional California --and Nevada --cosponsors.

As yet, there are NO cosponsors from Nevada on either the Senate or House resolution.

If your representative is not one of the four above, PLEASE contact your member of Congress, with a cosponsorship request: (Now, during August recess, when they are not busy with routine legislative demands, is a good time. Staff are at work. Your legislator may have a local town hall at which you can make a direct request.)

You can take action on 30x30 bills in Congress at sc.org/30x30. Even more effective can be to start direct personal email correspondence with the environmental staff of your representative (contact vicky.hoover@sierraclub.org if you need staff name and email.)

Here is an easy message to give when emailing the enviro staffer of your member of Congress:

“As a citizen concerned about the loss of biodiversity in our country and throughout the world, and knowing that Nature conservation helps combat the climate crisis, I am asking your boss please to sign on as a cosponsor of H. Res. 835, which seeks a national goal of conserving 30 percent of the land and ocean of the United States by 2030. I hope that he/she will help this visionary new campaign by signing on to H. Res. 835, with Rep. Deb Haaland’s office.”

Esselen Tribe regains a small part of their ancestral California central coast tribal lands

In late July, a purchase was completed that gave back to the Big Sur-area Esselen tribe nearly two square miles of its ancestral lands near California's central coast. It marked the first time that the Esselen Tribe has regained any of its former territory along and inland from the Monterey County coast -- more than 200 years after Spanish missionaries upended the tribe's society, causing 90 percent of the roughly 1,000 Esselen people by the early 1800s to die of disease and other causes.

The historic acquisition received notice in many California newspapers as well as from the California Historical Society; we quote here from the account by environmental reporter Paul Rogers in the July 27 *San Jose Mercury News*:

"Nearly 250 years ago, when Spanish soldiers built a military outpost in Monterey, and Franciscan padres founded the Carmel, Soledad, and San Antonio missions nearby, the Esselen tribe — who had lived in the area for 8,000 years — was decimated. Brought to the missions to be converted to Catholicism, Esselen families were broken up and deprived of their culture, their language and their lands by the late 1700s.

This summer, for the first time, their descendants finally got some of the land back.

In a deal rich with historic significance, the Esselen Tribe of Monterey County closed escrow to purchase 1,199 acres in Big Sur as part of a \$4.5 million acquisition involving the state and Western Rivers Conservancy, an Oregon-based environmental group... Located along Palo Colorado Road on the north side of the Little Sur River about 20 miles south of Monterey and 5 miles inland from the ocean, the land features endangered steelhead trout, old-growth redwoods, oak woodlands and meadows along scenic ridge tops...

'It is beyond words for us, the highest honor,' said Tom Little Bear Nason, chairman of the Esselen Tribe

of Monterey County. 'The land is the most important thing to us. It is our homeland, the creation story of our lives. We are so elated and grateful. We're the original stewards of the land. Now we're returned,' he said. 'We are going to conserve it and pass it on to our children and grandchildren and beyond.'"

A special land for conservation

The property, known as Rancho Aguila, had been owned since the 1950s by Swedish immigrant Axel Adler. After Adler died in 2004, his family later put it up for sale. After years of negotiations, the Western Rivers Conservancy bought the land for its eventual transfer to the Esselen tribe.

Because of its special features, this land—including a stand of some of the southernmost redwoods in the world—that has adapted to warmer climates, plus uninterrupted Duncan lousewort, madrone forest, ridgetop grasslands, chaparral, and steelhead-spawning spots—together with prime habitats for the California condor and nesting grounds for eagles and marbled murrelets, became a critical preservation goal for Western Rivers Conservancy. Thus, when the ranch went up for sale, the Conservancy set out to purchase it with the goal of protecting the stretch of the Little Sur River that flows through the property. Their first intention was to transfer it to the Forest Service (Los Padres National Forest) but the close ties to this land of the Esselen tribe led them to work with tribal representatives. Sue Doroff, president of the Western Rivers Conservancy, said, "To be a part of helping a tribe regain its lost homeland is great."

The Esselen are a Native American people who are indigenous to the Santa Lucia Mountains south of the Big Sur River in Monterey County, California. Before Spanish colonization, they lived seasonally on the coast and inland, surviving off the plentiful seafood during the summer and acorns and wildlife during the rest of the year. An estimated 100 to 200 individuals lived in the steep, rocky region when the Spanish arrived.



<https://www.esselentribe.org/our-land>

During the mission period, the Esselen worked at the three nearby missions, Mission San Carlos, Mission Nuestra Señora de la Soledad, and Mission San Antonio de Padua. Like many Native American populations, their members succumbed to diseases to which they had no natural resistance.

Some tribal members avoided the mission life and worked on nearby ranches in the early and late 1800s. Descendants of the Esselen are currently scattered, but many still live in the Monterey Peninsula area and nearby regions.

The parcel was purchased with a grant provided by the California Natural Resources Agency. As Paul Rogers' article stated, "The agency awarded \$4.5 million for the deal to cover the \$4.35 million purchase price, along with studies of the property. The money came from Proposition 68, a \$4 billion state parks and water bond approved by California voters in 2018. The measure included \$60 million to acquire Native American natural, cultural and historic resources in California."

Tribal leaders plan to use the land to reinvigorate tribal culture, conduct traditional ceremonies, and teach the public about their culture and history. The land will be open for ceremonial and educational use by Central Coast tribes, including the Esselen, Rumsen, Chalone, Sureño, Chunchunes and Guatcharrone people, as Nason says. They will build a sweat lodge and traditional village but no permanent homes or businesses on the property, which is in view of Pico Blanco, or Pixchi, the sacred center of creation in tribal traditions.

The ancient redwoods on the property could serve as a nursery for redwood seeds, which may prove crucial for climate change adaptation. ♪

K2 Gold seeks to build new road on remote Conglomerate Mesa

-- by Maria Jesus

As a graduate student at California Botanic Garden, I have devoted much of the past two years to understanding the unique plant diversity of a little-known corner of the California desert called Conglomerate Mesa. Here, narrow endemics like the Inyo rock daisy (*Perityle inyoensis*) abound, but are nearly impossible to find just a few miles away. A surprisingly large number of rare plant species, like the diminutive Badger Flat thread plant (*Nemacladus inyoensis*) and the robust Shockley's prickly leaf (*Hecastocleis shockleyi*), have long thrived in this extreme desert environment. Today, their habitat is threatened.

I came to Conglomerate Mesa to research its unique desert flora, but my love for the plants and desire to protect them has unexpectedly led me to study public lands policy. I learned that this area is vulnerable to mining despite conservation designations meant to protect unique cultural and natural values.

Conglomerate Mesa is part of the National Conservation Lands of the California Desert and also contains an Area of Critical Environmental Concern. But -- these federal lands are still subject to a law established in 1800s -- a time when the prevailing view was that the arid lands that couldn't be farmed by settlers should be mined for profit. According to Earthworks, The General Mining Law of 1872 is still interpreted to mean that hard rock mining



photo: Evan Frost

is the "highest and best use" of certain federal lands.

Conglomerate Mesa landscape with Joshua trees (*yucca brevifolia*)

Right now, K2 Gold (along with its subsidiary "Mojave Precious Metals"), an international mining company, is pursuing the mining of gold and other minerals found deep beneath the surface of Conglomerate Mesa. According to K2 Gold's website, <http://www.k2gold.com/> they will begin drilling exploration wells between late August and early September. Their permit requires them to transport heavy equipment by helicopter in order to limit excessive impacts to this roadless and ecologically intact landscape, but K2 Gold wants more. They seek permission from the

Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to build a road to allow for extensive drilling. This could "pave the way" for extensive road-related ecosystem damage.

California's unique desert habitats are increasingly threatened by land-use and climate change. Intact landscapes like Conglomerate Mesa should not be sacrificed for short-term economic

gain.

BLM's permitting

process will include a public comment period this fall. Be sure to check out the latest from our partners at Friends of the Inyo, who are monitoring the situation. (Also see WOW, Dec 17, Aug 18, Apr 20.)

Friends of the Inyo now adds: "Since K2 Gold, a Canadian mining company, recently took over the Conglomerate Mesa gold exploration plan, and although helicopter access at seven drill sites is currently permitted, they have now proposed drilling 30 additional sites and the construction of a new road into this pristine roadless desert gem. If K2's plan is realized, then the next, and irrevocable, step to developing an open-pit cyanide heap-leach mine will have been completed. *There is no way to truly recover the land once these roads are plowed into Conglomerate Mesa.* .

"Once the BLM reviews K2's proposed expanded plan, they will allow the opportunity for public comment. In the coming months, the BLM needs to hear opposition from all of us to this project. Conglomerate Mesa should be protected, not exploited. When the comment period opens, we will call on you to help us by submitting comments."

Go to: <https://friendsoftheinyo.org/> 

(Maria Jesus is a graduate student at the California Botanic Garden in Claremont, CA)



Photo: Maria Jesus

The diminutive Badger Flat threadplant (*Nemacladus inyoensis*) is a species new to science and was recently documented in the Conglomerate Mesa area. Use a hand lens for this tiny plant.

15 Miles of New Trails without any Environmental Review?

– by Lynn Boulton



Photo: Sam Roberts

Looking down into Solitude Canyon

Trail proponents in Mammoth Lakes recently asked the Forest Service to approve the development of 15 miles of new multi-use trails in two Eastern Sierra locations: several short segments in the Mammoth Lakes Basin and one long segment from Solitude Canyon over the Sherwin Crest and down to the Mammoth Lakes Basin. The trails would be geared primarily to extreme mountain bikers, trail runners and others.

These new trails would connect to other trails and allow one to circumnavigate the Town of Mammoth Lakes—a dream come true for some, but a nightmare for wildlife and a degradation of the environment.

On June 8, the Inyo National Forest issued a brief, 2.5 page scoping notice and proposed to issue a categorical exclusion under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) for this project.

The scoping document included a map of the trails, but no description. The next step is a final decision from the District Ranger with a short summary of the environmental impacts and required mitigations. With a categorical exclusion, there will be no environmental assessment (EA) or environmental impact statement (EIS), no analysis of alternatives, nor an opportunity for the public to challenge or augment the information that the decision will be based on.

However, our public lands are too valuable for this project to be a slam-

dunk. At least 12 of those 15 miles of new trail would be in the pristine Sherwin Inventoried Roadless Area that has wilderness qualities. Solitude Canyon is a critical migration corridor for the largest mule deer herd in the central Eastern Sierra. Mule deer use this corridor during

spring and fall migrations to reach the high Sierra meadows. Some deer give birth to their fawns and spend the summer in the canyon.

The trail would cut through an incredibly diverse old-growth conifer forest with Jeffrey pine, western white pine, whitebark pine, red and white fir, lodgepole pine, Sierra juniper, and mountain hemlock. It is unusual to see stands of western white pine such as are found here. There's aspen and willow in the talus areas; limber pine on the crest. Pikas live in the rock jumbles. There is potential habitat for the Sierra Nevada red fox, a candidate endangered species. None of these remarkable and valuable features were described in the scoping document. The public was just given a line on a map. Those who commented had to do their own research and/or hike the proposed Solitude Canyon trail route to get an idea of what would be impacted by a trail and what would be sacrificed.

Local community members helped design the short trail segments being proposed in the Mammoth Lakes Basin, but not the controversial trail through Solitude Canyon. It would primarily serve

mountain bikers, hardy hikers, and runners in training, perhaps. It is too steep and rocky for equestrians and certainly would not be safe to share with bikers. For the sake of still more recreational development in Mammoth, this new trail would push out wildlife in the only migration corridor open to them. Marketing of this trail will finalize the conversion of habitat at a time when loss of wildlife habitat is unprecedented, and there are calls to preserve 30 percent of nature. (See pp. 4-5.)

The proposal is being framed as a “locals” issue, but it is not just up to the locals to decide how public lands are used. All citizens should get a chance to help shape this decision, and many would have a broader view than the Town of Mammoth Lakes. That is exactly why NEPA requires an EA or an EIS and consideration of a range of alternatives including “No Action”. It is to make sure decisions are made on the best available science with many perspectives considered.

The Sierra Club and several other environmental groups signed on Friends of Inyo's request for an EA. This project does not qualify for a categorical exclusion.

WHAT YOU CAN DO: Comments are being accepted until the Forest Service makes a decision. Please ask that an EA be the next step—not a final decision. Email your comment letter to : District Ranger Gordon Martin (c/o Matthew Paruolo) at matthew.paruolo@usda.gov. 🍷

(Lynn Boulton is chair, Toiyabe Chapter Range of Light Group)



photo: Kyle Hamada, Friends of the Inyo

Old-growth Jeffrey pine forest in Solitude Canyon



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

CANCELLED

All Sierra Club trips have been through the end of September, at least.

Then—why even have an outing page in this Words of the Wild?

Because the wild is out there still, real, tangible, protected places on the land – and some of our wilderness advocates do go out on the land as individual volunteers--see September note below and July 4 trip report.

Opportunity for interested volunteers:
September 25-28, 2020

Kingston Range Wilderness

The committee's spring Kingston Range wilderness service trip (just north of the Mojave National Preserve) was cancelled. But repair work on the Amethyst Canyon trail still needs to be done, so several wilderness committee members have arranged with BLM's Needles office wilderness coordinator to head out there for this work project over the Public Lands Day weekend. We'll camp at the new Horsethief campground, we'll wear face coverings for most situations, and practice careful physical distancing. We still have room for a limited number of volunteers—but must keep the group to ten or fewer to facilitate the appropriate distancing. There will be an optional group commissary. If you are interested in joining this volunteer project, please contact Vicky Hoover, vicky.hoover@sierraclub.org, or 415-928-1038.

Trip report: July 4th Mt Grafton Wilderness Service

Since the Sierra Club service trip to eastern Nevada, for Memorial Day was cancelled, wilderness volunteers joined BLM staff over the July 4th weekend to carry out the planned project in the Mt Grafton Wilderness. This wilderness of nearly 80,000 acres in White Pine County was designated in 2006; Mt Grafton, at 10,997 ft., is the highest point in Nevada on BLM lands. (Areas above 11,000 ft. became national forests.) Wilderness committee members climbed Mt Grafton on July 4, 2003. This time our task was clearing vegetation intruding upon the wilderness access road—to give visitors a good route to the marked trail at end of the cherry stemmed road into the wilderness, The trail, with an informative kiosk, leads up the slope eventually to Mt Grafton itself.

Our seven volunteers, from Utah, Nevada, and California, met in Ely Friday afternoon, and then our caravan, led by BLM's wilderness coordinator Robert Valenzuela, headed south along side roads, at first broad and graded--finally narrow, twisting 10-mph--to road's end where we set up camp in a picturesque mountain mahogany grove at



photo: Vicky Hoover

On the trail

7500 ft. Here we camped—with distancing—for three full-moon nights. We worked along the road with hand saws and loppers Saturday and Sunday. A Sunday morning hike up the trail gave broad views over eastern Nevada's wilds. Here, truly, we could relish "the West's most under-appreciated state for its wild values."

BLM wilderness coordinator Robert Valenzuela began his job a year ago – and



photo: Susanna Murphy

we first met him on last year's Goshute Canyon trip. John Miller, his predecessor, with whom we worked on many trips since 2009, and who now oversees all BLM-land recreation out of Ely, joined us Saturday--to help work and visit with friends from past trips. Also joining us again was BLM's Mark Lowrie, and, as usual, the BLM folks seem to work twice as hard as anyone else. 🌿



photo: Robert Valenzuela

At work

Registration is NOW open!

Wilderness in a Time of Change

National Wilderness Workshop virtual sessions offered October 9 & 13-16,

As we reported in our last issue, (April 2020), this is our YEAR FOR STEWARDSHIP – and a great way to immerse yourself in wilderness stewardship issues is to participate in this year’s virtual workshop!

In response to COVID-19, the annual National Wilderness Workshop will be held *virtually* in 2020. Each day focuses on a theme and begins with a structured coffee hour followed by two mid-day sessions. Sessions will include a mix of presentations by subject matter experts, panels, small group and breakout group discussion and role-playing experiential learning.

The virtual event is designed to appeal to Wilderness fans of all stages--stakeholders, practitioners, volunteers, academics, visitors, enthusiasts. If you value wilderness lands for any reason --even if you do not go to wilderness--then why not join us?!

In our previous notice on this event (see WOW April 2020) we talked about the event planned for U.C. Merced and Yosemite. But, since

then, the steady progression and longer time frame with recurring “spikes” of the COVID-19 pandemic forced workshop planners to make this a virtual event. While we’ll miss the personal contacts of a live gathering, the virtual platform will make it possible for more people to participate, from a wider geographic area, at less cost.

So: why not sign up today? The 2020 National Wilderness workshop registration is now live! <http://www.wildernessstewardship.org/wildernessworkshop/2016#id=109&wid=3101&c id=1165>.

Register by September 3 for only \$75.

Registration for currently enrolled students is free with a discount code (see website.) And our wilderness committee can help offer registration help for some qualified applicants.

The full draft agenda is available online. Daily themes include:
**Friday, October 9--Virtual Yosemite;
**Tuesday, October 13--Ecological change
**Wednesday, October 14--Culture, with focus on inclusion, affinity groups and

spaces, and tribal relations;
**Thursday, October 15--Science, with focus on economics and public health;
**Friday, October 16 - Management, with focus on wilderness stewardship in a time of COVID and community-based science.

Or, you can obtain all needed information about agenda, registration, etc by simply going to the Society for Wilderness Stewardship website: <http://www.wildernessstewardship.org/node/271>.

The Society for Wilderness Stewardship and the National Wilderness Stewardship alliance have organized and conducted these annual workshops --held in different locations across the country, such as Missoula, Montana; Bend, Oregon; Gunnison, Colorado; and Russellville, Arkansas--since 2012. This will be the first time the workshop has gone virtual.

Questions? Contact one of the two CA/NV Wilderness Committee members who are on the National Workshop’s planning team, JoAnne Clarke, jo_clarke@att.net or Vicky Hoover, Vicky.hoover@sierraclub.org.

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.

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**Justice for land and people:
If they don't come together,
they'll never come separately**

-- Clayton Daughenbaugh

