

# WORDS OF *the* WILD

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

## Celebrating Wild Anniversaries:

### California Desert protection turns 25 Wilderness Act: Alive & well at 55

**T**he California Desert Protection Act was signed by President Bill Clinton on October 31, 1994, but the effort to enact our nation's largest land protection measure outside of Alaska began years earlier—perhaps back

in the late 1970s, when the Bureau of Land Management's Desert District, as required by the 1976 Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA), inventoried its roadless lands and determined which to recommend as wilderness. Conservationists were aghast at BLM inadequacies--they recommended only the highest peaks, with no concern for migrating species--and at their management decisions that got even worse in the '80s with Secretary Jim Watt's pro-development actions.

During the early 1980s activists were kept busy getting the big California Wilderness Act passed, but once that happened, in 1984, Senator Cranston asked conservationists-- what's next? and the -- *continued page 2*

photo: Bob Cates




CA Desert Protection League training weekend at Andreas Canyon Clubhouse, Oct. 1988. L to R: Peter Burk, Joyce Burk, Elden Hughes, Judy Anderson.

## Nevada Wilderness turns 30

**A**nne Macquarie, Toiyabe Chapter chair, reminds us that Nevada's premier national forest wildernesses proudly celebrate their 30<sup>th</sup> birthday this fall. Anne comments:

"On Dec. 5, 1989, President George Bush signed into being thirteen new Forest Service wilderness areas totaling close to a million acres, mostly on the tops of Nevada's highest mountain ranges--the Alta Toquima, Arc Dome, Boundary Peak, Currant Mountain, East Humboldts, Grant Range, Mt. Charleston, Mt. Moriah, Mt. Rose, Quinn Canyon, Ruby Mts., Santa Rosa-Paradise -- *continued page 2*

**A**bout the time I turned 55, I noticed I was shrinking a bit in size! Has anyone else noted such a phenomenon with advancing years? But not America's National Wilderness Preservation System-- darn if it doesn't get bigger with time! Since the 50th anniversary

five years ago, the System has aged ten percent and has grown--in omnibus bills and smaller individual area bills. All I can say is, *Happy Birthday Wilderness*, KEEP ON GROWING! California now has 15 percent of our state designated as wilderness, and Nevada has close to ten percent. Are we satisfied? See the Forest planning article on pp. 3-4. Will we ever be satisfied? See future issues of this newsletter.  (vnh)

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## CA Desert Protection anniversary --fr page 1

immediate response was—the *Desert*. He asked for a specific proposal, and before 1984 ended, conservationists began meeting to put together a proposal and to organize themselves into a real coalition representing Sierra Club plus many other organizations. They adopted the name, California Desert Protection League. Judy Anderson, Jim Dodson, and the late Elden Hughes became co-chairs. By October 1985, a draft bill was far enough along that Senator Cranston announced, at the 1985 California Wilderness Conference in Visalia, that he would soon introduce a “bill for the California Desert.”

### Judy remembers:

Judy Anderson, desert activist extraordinaire and emeritus, provided WOW, on request, with some personal memories of the eight-year campaign from bill introduction to final enactment:

“From the start of Senator Cranston’s involvement with our desert proposal, the burden was carried by his environmental staff member Kathy Files, later Kathy Lacey. We took the senator on several desert field trips, along with a few celebrities, such as Ed Begley, Jr. Cranston could talk to the press while sitting on a sand dune, or climbing a local peak. We took him to Joshua Tree, where University of California herpetologist Dr. Bob Stebbins showed him unique wildlife and how to howl at the moon....

“The hardest thing for me in those years was focusing on my mathematics teaching when I wanted to be in Washington, DC, and managing volunteer squabbles—over which areas to prioritize. In spite of some squabbles, we kept a unified front. Behind the scenes, in DC, Sierra Club’s public lands director, Debbie Sease, and Terry Sopher of The Wilderness Society kept the organizations in line. Debbie dealt with the volunteers, and Terry (and later Nobby Riedy) mainly with Congress.

“Also difficult was trying to juggle desert mapping work with homework assignments in landscape architecture courses.

“Easiest? Dealing with my ignorance of specific desert areas: A threesome –Jim Dodson, Mabel Barnes,

and I--would just go out and look, usually between Christmas and New Year’s and then we knew more than 80 percent of others who had never noticed a certain area. I drove Mabel’s 4WD on at least a dozen desert trips before I bought my own.

“Most terrifying... facing a BLM hearing when I wasn’t prepared for the questions and then driving home alone on the powerline road south of the Kelso Dunes... not too smart.

“Most fun? Free flights — one, being in the plane when Cranston toured the Crater/Last Chance area, landing in Death Valley. On another--in the copilot/navigator seat for Senator Wilson’s tour to the Whipple Mountains, and then two unexpected helicopter flights over wilderness proposals.

“Fondest memory... sitting on the floor--the only available space-- in Congressman Mel Levine’s DC office for map work with his staffer Betsy Ford.

“We had to balance between encouraging people to act on their own, and smiling when they needlessly duplicated someone else’s effort. So many people wanted to help... I tried to find things they would like doing. Hillary Gordon and Michelle Arend organized a seminar at Eaton Canyon; they tried to find at least one “parent” adopter for every wilderness.

“Then, the big day, when the bill (passed earlier in the year by the House) was up for final Senate vote on Saturday morning, October 8, 1994. The Desert Protective Council had a board meeting that day, and I was going out there with Bob and Maureen Cates. I tried to delay my departure as long as possible, but finally we had to leave the CSPAN--the Congressional TV Cable broadcast. When we got as far as Colton I insisted that we find a phone booth so that I could find out what happened. At last I got Bob Hattoy’s assistant Jan Salvay, at home, on the phone EXACTLY when it finally happened. So, when I got to Palm Desert and saw Harriet Allen from San Diego and told her the incredible news, we both broke down and cried... She said... literally, I had given up--I no longer expected to live to see it.

“The nicest thing about the bill signing in DC was ... so many of us were there... and far too many of us were shoe-horned into Marty Hayden’s home as guests. No matter: Our BIG victory was what mattered...”

## Nevada wilderness at 30 --fr p. 1

Peak, and Table Mountain Wilderness areas. Until then, for the 25 years since the original Act, Nevada could boast only one wilderness area--Jarbridge, in the far north. However, since 1989, Nevada, having practiced, got into the swing of wilderness designation and in 2000, 2002, 2004, 2006, and 2014, achieved much more, totaling some six million acres. And bringing the total number of Nevada wilderness areas up to 70--highest in the country after California and Arizona, with 156 and 90 respectively (No state can equal the AMOUNT of wilderness in Alaska’s 48 much larger areas). And we Nevadans aren’t done yet! While we celebrate wilderness, we are also planning the next land protection campaign.”

Activists celebrate the [then]-new Mt. Moriah Wilderness on the summit of 12,072-ft. Mt. Moriah in 1992, on a trip led by Marge Sill



photo: Vicky Hoover

Judy Anderson also sends us this notice from Death Valley National Park:

### Celebrate the 25th Anniversary of Death Valley National Park and the CA Desert Protection Act!

From October 26 - November 2, 2019. Death Valley National Park plans a week-long celebration for the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the California Desert Protection Act of 1994, which converted Death Valley and Joshua Tree from national monuments to national parks and established the 1.6 million acre Mojave National Preserve. Scientists, historians, and park rangers will offer presentations on geology, astronomy, desert tortoises, the history of Devils Hole and more!

On Saturday, November 2, former park managers involved with the Protection Act will speak in a round-table event about their experiences. Family-friendly activities will include ranger-led hikes and junior ranger programs. Find specific program details at our website ([www.nps.gov/deva](http://www.nps.gov/deva)) closer to the event.

# Sequoia and Sierra National Forest Plans are here

## Revised Plans to determine future of key federal lands in Southern Sierra

-- by Steve Evans

The U.S. Forest Service has released for public comment draft supplemental management plans for the Sequoia and Sierra National Forests in the southern Sierra Nevada. The public has been granted 90 days—**until September 26**--to comment on the future of 2.1 million acres of exceptional national forest lands in the Southern Sierra. This is the public's opportunity to help determine future management of the public lands that provide clean water for cities and farms, outstanding opportunities for outdoor recreation, world-renowned landscapes, and a refuge for many sensitive, threatened, and endangered plants and animals.

This is the Forest Service's second try at management plans for these two forests. The 2016 draft plans failed to address massive tree mortality on the western slope of the Sierra Nevada caused by the seven year drought and decades of commercial logging and fire prevention. So the agency went back to the drawing board and produced these new draft plans.

Conservationists are reviewing both draft plans and their Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) and Appendices, which total nearly 2,200 pages.

### Key issues needing strong public response:

⇒ **Wilderness** – Wilderness areas are an important source of clean water for downstream communities and farms, a critical refuge for sensitive wildlife and plant species, and an outstanding destination for visitors seeking primitive recreation or solitude. The Forest Service is required to inventory roadless areas and make recommendations as to which roadless areas should be protected in the National Wilderness Preservation System.

Much of the existing wilderness on the two forests is classic “rock and ice” above 8,000 feet. Conservation organizations have repeatedly urged the agency to expand the representation in the National Wilderness System of lower elevation mixed conifer, oak woodland, and chaparral ecosystems.

Unfortunately, the Sierra Forest draft plan does not recommend one acre of wilderness out of an inventory of 312,840 acres of roadless lands that meet wilderness

criteria. The Sequoia draft recommends a paltry 4,900-acre addition to the Monarch Wilderness out of 535,046 acres of roadless lands meeting wilderness criteria.

A key Sierra Forest area worthy of wilderness protection but ignored by the Forest Service is the 66,322-acre Kings River Monarch Wilderness addition. Ranging from 1,000 feet elevation (near the confluence of the Kings and North Fork Kings Rivers) to the 14,000 foot Sierra crest, this would provide a protected corridor for wildlife and plant species to migrate in response to climate change. Another high priority is the 46,298-acre Devils Gulch-Ferguson Ridge roadless area encompassing the South Fork Merced Wild & Scenic River. Other eligible areas with under-represented ecosystems include Oat Mountain (10,981 acres), Sycamore Springs (17,907 acres), Bear Mountain (9,245 acres), and the San Joaquin River canyon downstream from Mammoth Pool dam, which would extend the existing mostly alpine Ansel Adams Wilderness down to about 2,200 feet in the Sierra foothills.

Although the Sequoia draft plan does recommend adding 4,900 acres to the southern boundary of the Monarch Wilderness, the Forest Service has ignored equally compelling arguments to increase the ecological diversity of the Wilderness System to several key lower elevation areas. The agency failed to recommend a proposed 41,282-acre addition to the Golden Trout Wilderness encompassing much of the North Fork Kern Wild & Scenic River canyon; two scenic roadless areas above the North Fork Kern recreation area upstream of Kernville –32,000-acre Stormy Canyon and 30,910-acre Cannell Peak proposed wilderness areas; and a 26,697-acre western addition to the existing Domeland Wilderness.



photo: Steve Evans

Dinkey Creek, Upper gorge

⇒ **Wild & Scenic Rivers** – Wild & Scenic Rivers are managed to protect their free-flowing character, water quality, and outstanding scenery, recreation, fish, wildlife, geology, ecology, history, and cultural values. The Forest Service is required to conduct a comprehensive eligibility assessment of rivers and streams for wild and scenic protection.

A rare bright spot in the draft plans is that the Sequoia wild and scenic inventory greatly expands the 75 miles of eligible streams identified in the 1990s to 341 miles. Several important tributaries to the North Fork Kern Wild & Scenic River have been newly determined by the Forest Service to be eligible for protection, including Salmon Creek, Brush Creek, Bull Run Creek (including its tributary Deep Creek), Dry Meadow Creek (including two tributaries), Freeman Creek, and several tributaries of the Little Kern River. The Sequoia draft plan also identifies three tributaries of the South Fork Kern River as eligible for protection, including Trout Creek, Fish Creek, and Bitter Creek. Protecting these will preserve the outstanding water quality, native fish species, and above average biotic integrity of the North and South Forks of the Kern.

In addition, the Sequoia draft plan finds eligible the South Fork Middle Fork Tule River and its tributary Belknap Creek, which now join existing segments of the North Fork Tule River and North Fork Middle Fork Tule, -- *continued page 4*

# Protecting Native Habitats from too Much Fire

-- by Richard W. Halsey

Artificially adding more fire to California's wildlands through prescribed burns will, in many situations, accelerate the loss of native habitat we already face due to resource extracting activities, climate change, and an increasing population. Therefore, it is critical that the public and policy makers obtain science-based information so they can effectively challenge the often-repeated misconception that all of California's wildlands "need" more fire. This impression was given in an article by Flick and Aldren (2019) that appeared in the April issue of *Words of the Wild*.

Here are basic, science-based

facts about fire in California.

## 1. Chaparral fire patterns are different from forest fire patterns.

Chaparral, the state's most extensive ecosystem, is characterized by drought-hardy shrubs like the iconic burgundy-barked manzanita and blue-flowering ceanothus. Once the preferred habitat of the California grizzly bear, chaparral covers many of the state's hills and mountains with rich biodiversity that reaches its peak on the central coast. Most of California's coastal Wilderness areas, such as the Ventana, San Rafael, and San Gabriel are mainly composed of chaparral. Although chaparral is



photo: Richard Halsey

Manzanita chaparral close up

primarily a California treasure, it also extends north into southern Oregon, south into Baja California, and as isolated patches in central and southeastern Arizona.

The chaparral's natural fire pattern results in large, -- continued page 5

## Sierra & Sequoia Forest plans -- fr p 3

which were found eligible in the 1990s.

On the other hand, the Sierra draft plan has gone backwards in its wild and scenic river inventory. The 2016 draft plan identified an impressive 640 miles of eligible river and stream segments on the Sierra Forest. This has now shrunk to 35.5 miles. Entire rivers and streams became suddenly ineligible, or eligible segments were shortened.

For example, the entire 30+ miles of Dinkey Creek from its source in the Dinkey Lakes Wilderness to

outstandingly values. In the 2019 draft plan, even the upper segment of Dinkey Creek previously found eligible shrinks to just 4.7 miles.

⇒ Recreation – Nearly 1.5 million people visit the Sierra Forest every year for outdoor recreation. Outdoor recreation contributes \$1.57 billion to the economy of the southern Sierra and south Central Valley. The most popular outdoor activities are camping, trail sports, and water sports, and most visitors use the recreation facilities, including campgrounds, picnic areas, roads to trailheads, and trails. Chronic budget cuts have led the Forest Service to reduce services at campgrounds and other recreation sites, leave roads and trails unmaintained, and fund fewer rangers. The Sierra and Sequoia draft plans fail to address funding issues--at the minimum, the final plans should include a proposed budget to sustain recreation facilities and opportunities.

## Learn More about the Forest Plans

Wilderness, wild and scenic rivers, and sustainable recreation are just a few of the issues in the draft Sequoia and Sierra plans. Wait for further action alerts, or take your own deep dive into the draft plans by reviewing them on line at: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/r5/landmanagement/>

[planning/?cid=STELPRD3802842](https://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/r5/landmanagement/planning/?cid=STELPRD3802842)

On August 14, the Forest Service is holding "virtual office hours" to provide an opportunity for the public to submit questions by email and receive answers.

In addition, two public workshops are scheduled to provide the public the opportunity to review maps and displays summarizing key aspects of the draft plans and to ask questions of Forest Service resource specialists. The workshops are:

- Tuesday, Aug. 20, 5:30-8:30 p.m. at The Station, 7900 Downing Avenue in Bakersfield (Sequoia Forest).
- Wednesday, August 21, 5:30-8:30 p.m. at the Clovis Veteran's Memorial District, 808 4th Street, in Clovis (Sierra Forest).

For more information about the virtual office hours and the public workshops, visit: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/r5/landmanagement/planning/?cid=STELPRD3842322>

The deadline for public comments is Sep. 26, 2019. You can submit your comments electronically by visiting this line: <https://cara.ecosystem-management.org/Public/CommentInput?Project=3375> Contact Steve Evans with questions or for more information, email: [sevans@calwild.org](mailto:sevans@calwild.org); phone: (916) 708-3155. ☞

(Steve Evans is Wild and Scenic River Program Director for the California Wilderness Coalition (CalWild) and is a long-time active member of the Sierra Club's Mother Lode Chapter.)



photo: Steve Evans

Kings River hikers

its confluence with the North Fork Kings River has outstanding scenic, recreation, wildlife, historical/cultural, and ecological values. The 2016 draft found about 15 miles of upper Dinkey Creek to be eligible but claimed that the lower creek, internationally renowned for whitewater kayaking, possessed no

continued from previous page, p 4.

high-intensity crown fires occurring 30 to 150 years or more apart where all above-ground plant cover is burned. Unfortunately, increasing fire frequencies threaten most of our state's chaparral plant communities by not allowing enough time for keystone

the majority of California's wildlands. In fact, fire suppression has helped delay the loss of native shrublands like chaparral throughout the state (Keeley et al. 2009). Recognition of the risk of increased fire frequency in chaparral led California State Senator Hanna-Beth Jackson to add an important caveat to her recent bill on prescribed burning (SB 1260):

*"Prescribed burning, mastication, herbicide application, mechanical thinning, or other vegetative treatments of chaparral or sage scrub shall occur only if the department finds that the activity will not cause "type conversion" away from the chaparral and coastal sage scrub currently on site."*

### 3. Adaptation to fire requires hundreds of thousands to millions of years.

The belief that plant species have developed adaptations to fire over the past 5-10,000 years due to human-caused burning is contrary to the basics of evolutionary science. Most California plant species are adapted to specific fire patterns or regimes that have evolved over the past ten million years. Changes in fire frequency, intensity, and seasonality can dramatically reduce biodiversity, often type-converting a healthy ecosystem into a non-native weed lot. This has occurred in many areas in California, by both accidental and prescribed fire.

### 4. Native Californians used fire to modify the environment to improve their chances of survival.

Burning helped early human communities exploit the natural environment, but such activity was not necessary to help maintain healthy vegetation communities—which had existed as functioning ecosystems for millions of years prior to human settlement. In fact, there is strong evidence that the aboriginal use of fire, especially along the central coast, led to the elimination of native shrublands near population centers (Keeley 2002). Also, the notion that early humans were able to prevent large wildfires by their burning activity when today armies of firefighters and aircraft cannot, defies

logic and ignores the devastating power of wind-driven fire. Like earthquakes, large, high-intensity wildfires have always been a natural part of California's landscape (Keeley and Zedler 2009). Consequently, we need to adapt to our fire-prone environment rather than pretending we can force Nature to adapt to us.

### 5. Management of wildlands must emphasize protection, and the preservation of habitat, not economic gain.

Many public lands are managed through "collaboratives" of various interest groups. Unfortunately, most of these collaboratives are composed of members who generally seek to exploit natural landscapes for human benefit, rather than maintaining biodiverse ecosystems (Wuerthner 2019). This is the case for the Dinkey Landscape Restoration Trust, cited by Flick and Aldren, which is more a logging collaborative than a restoration group. Its use of fire mainly involves burning logging slash piles after intensive commercial logging on the Sierra National Forest.

We must adapt to a rapidly changing world: with millions of people on the landscape, with the invasion of highly flammable, non-native grasses and weeds not present hundreds of years ago, and with climate change creating a drier, more flammable landscape. The most effective way to protect what wild is left is to reduce carbon emissions and make forward-looking land management decisions based on science with a bias in favor of Nature.

(Richard Halsey is director of the California Chaparral Institute, a nonprofit educational and research organization dedicated to the preservation of the chaparral, helping communities live safely in fire-prone environments, and inspiring people discover their true nature through Nature. <http://www.californiachaparral.org/>)

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-- continued page 6, bottom



photo: Richard Halsey

Chaparral community overview, featuring white ceanothus

shrub species to restore the soil seed bank to successfully colonize post-fire. In addition, repeated fires below a 10-20-year interval can lead to the invasion of non-native, highly flammable weeds and grasses which ultimately increase an area's flammability and hence, further increase fire frequencies (Brooks et al. 2004).

On the other hand, mixed conifer and ponderosa/Jeffrey-pine forests on the western slopes of the Sierra Nevada generally have had mixed-severity fires with intervals between 20-60 years that typically include large patches burned at high-severity (Baker 2017). These patches are critical in maintaining California's biodiversity in that they create important, early-seral snag forest habitats. Unfortunately, the Forest Service destroys large amounts of such habitats through post-fire salvage logging. One such project is currently being conducted within the Rim Fire area of the Stanislaus National Forest.

### 2. Fire suppression has protected the biodiversity of California's native shrublands from excessive fire.

Although there is indeed a fire deficit in some, but not all forests due to past fire suppression, this is not the case for

The Sierra Club is part of the Nature For All Coalition which works to ensure that all Angelenos no matter where they live have equal access to the San Gabriel Mountains, which are two thirds of Los Angeles’ open space and serve as the recreational backyard for more than 17 million people. Nature for All is a local/regional coalition formerly known as the San Gabriel Mountains Forever Coalition, which has worked to increase protection and access to the San Gabriel Mountains for more than ten years. In spite of a name change two years ago, the Coalition—including Sierra Club—retains the San Gabriel Mountains Forever campaign as an ongoing effort.

photo: Roberto Morales



Participants in a San Gabriel Mountains area river cleanup in June relax at the Oaks Picnic Area after working hard

The first big Coalition win came in 2014 with the declaration by President Obama of the San Gabriel Mountains as a National Monument. Then, in April of this year we celebrated the reintroduction of the San Gabriel Mountains, Foothills and River Protection Act by Congresswoman Judy Chu, (D-CA27) as HR 2215. At the same time Senator Kamala Harris introduced a Senate companion bill, S 1109. The Chu bill had first been introduced in July of 2017 in the 115<sup>th</sup> Congress. (See WOW, Aug 2017, Sept 2016, Aug and Dec 2015, Dec 2014.)

These bills aim to protect wild lands, open space and rivers and improve recreation opportunities in Los Angeles County. In addition, this legislation would designate 25.3 miles of Wild and Scenic Rivers in the San Gabriel Mountains.

The San Gabriel Mountains play a vital role in our economy, recreation and relaxation. The San Gabriel Mountains National Monument is also the source of one-third of Los Angeles County’s drinking water. A large portion of the range comprises the Angeles National

Forest, and includes two wilderness areas – Sheep Mountain of 43,000 acres and the 36,100-acre San Gabriel Wilderness.

Stretching from Santa Clarita in the northwest, past Pasadena, and eastward on to San Bernardino along the northern rim of the Los Angeles Basin, the San Gabriel Mountains provide the opportunity for Californians to enjoy the health benefits linked to outdoor activity, such as a decrease in childhood asthma and diabetes.

The new Chu legislation also recently received a hearing by the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands and was referred to the full Natural Resources Committee.

**National Monument plan progress**

We are also happy to report that the National Monument Management Plan, on which we have been heavily engaged almost ever since the 2014 monument proclamation, was recently finalized. The final plan includes an innovative “Transit to Trails” plan designed to complement a countywide Transit to Trails bus system on which we are working with local and county transportation agencies. This will substantially increase San Gabriels access for families without a car, as well as help limit greenhouse gas emissions.

We aim to create a new public perception of, and identity for, the San Gabriel Mountains—to expand resources for healthy, sustainable recreational opportunities (in particular for historically underserved communities) and to mobilize the next generation of environmental stewards. We will ensure that communities traditionally underrepresented in the environmental movement are included in all of our work. We’ve also brought in more diverse and young individuals to the Sierra Club by working with the Angeles Chapter’s Forest Committee, and Central Group, as well as the Chapter’s Outdoors Team including the Wilderness Travel Course.

Our nation’s public lands — whether they are iconic national treasures or local parks — should mirror the greatness of America, embody the spirit of our people, and celebrate our historical and cultural achievements. We absolutely need to engage diverse communities in order to ensure that all Americans can feel a sense of ownership and pride in contributing to our nation’s public lands for generations to come. ♪

(Roberto Morales is Sierra Club’s Lead Community Organizer in Los Angeles working with the San Gabriel Mountains Forever Campaign, (213)387-6528 x213)

**Protecting Native habitat/Chaparral**  
— from page 5

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## Restoring natural processes in High Sierra Wilderness around the John Muir Trail

*New John Muir Trail Foundation offers assistance*

“Protecting wilderness, its natural processes, and the renewable source of clean water for millions of downstream users, is inextricably linked to the management and rehabilitation of popular, highly-used wilderness destinations.” (From Yosemite National Park’s “In the Wild” on-line story book, May 2019)

The John Muir Trail and its interconnecting trail network is that wilderness ecosystem. Approximately 220 miles long and 20 miles wide, the Muir Trail network covers roughly 2,800,000 acres of land and encompasses the heart of the Sierra Nevada snowpack that is essential to the health and well-being of some 25 million people and of the agriculture of the Central Valley.

John Muir Trail Foundation founder and president Marla Stark describes how she became inspired to help the iconic trail:

“I had hiked parts of the JMT in my twenties and remembered how the region looked 40 years ago. In 2015, a friend asked me to join him and a pal for the Onion Valley to Muir Trail Ranch segment, 90 miles with five of the highest passes. I was truly stunned to amazement, at the sheer magnitude of the landscapes, with rock cliffs rising like giant tidal waves out of some primeval past, the alpenglow glistening like glowing embers. I could also see the areas that were degraded by people. Harmful human impacts were all too visible. I realized that the fame of the trail as the first and oldest in America, and certainly one of its most scenic, had attracted a flood of visitors that became a tsunami in the last decades.

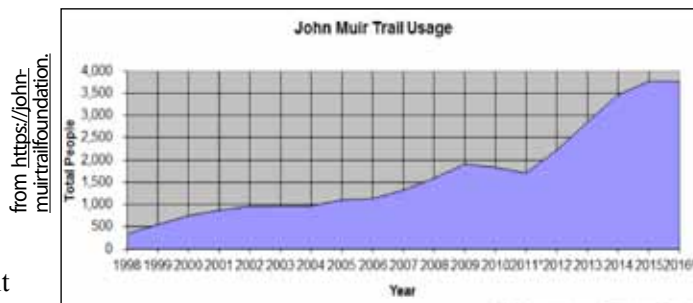
I grabbed some good friends and colleagues from my professional career to lend a hand to find out what we could do. We discovered that, unlike nearly every national park or trail in America, the JMT had never had a non-profit dedicated to its environmental health. So in May 2018, we started one.”

The Foundation’s mission is “dedicated to the conservation of the John Muir Trail (est.1915) for people to enjoy

for the centuries to come by caring for the wilderness, wildlife and waters along its path in the high Sierra Nevada of California.”

The federal agencies responsible for our stewarding national parks and wilderness trails, the National Park Service and the United States Forest Service, depend on private support to supplement their funding. With the federal budget constantly under stress, private dollars can boost the efforts, fund critical wilderness restoration and management initiatives outside the agencies’ budgets, and moderate the impact of any federal belt-tightening.

Requests for use and actual use on the John Muir Trail have risen so much and so fast that the capacity of the trail itself is at risk of overflowing. From 2014 to 2015, the National Park Service reported reservation data for JMT permits increased 242 percent. Quotas and lotteries imposed at trailheads attempt to measure and moderate the number of hikers and backpackers on the JMT. Meanwhile ever more applications come in for the pre-existing trailhead quotas. In 2017, nearly 45,000 people entered the lottery for an overnight permit at the southern JMT terminus, Whitney Portal, only a quarter of whom received a permit. The majority of people who are unable to get a permit, even after serial applications, typically enter through one of the lateral access trails, putting increased environmental pressure on those trails as well as on the JMT itself.



from <https://johnmuirtrailfoundation.org>

To support the rise in public demand, the John Muir Trail Foundation hopes to raise money through donations to provide additional private funds and

volunteers to help the federal agencies manage the use sustainably. The broader area of the extensive JMT Backcountry, including the lateral access trails, requires substantial federal resources and staffing. Problems include illegal campsites and fire pits, rutted and branching trails, tracked meadows, poorly buried waste, and accumulating debris. Yosemite National Park reports that about half of all campsites in its wilderness were illegal, damaging water sources, meadows and habitat, and watershed. It takes constant efforts to find and restore these careless campsites and repair surrounding damage. Only with a consistent multi-year program can wilderness be restored from the relentless human footprint.

### A plan to begin restoration

The Foundation has a plan to repair and restore environmental damage at certain high-use locations along the John Muir Trail. Our first efforts are a couple of simultaneous projects to take place in the Ansel Adams Wilderness in the Inyo National Forest just south of Yosemite National Park, and in the Kings Canyon National Park at the heart of the Kings River watershed.

The Ansel Adams Wilderness efforts will begin in the Donohue Pass basin and proceed southward along the JMT to Rosalie Lake. Restoration work will include most of the near-level terrain around Thousand Island Lake, Garnet Lake, Shadow Lake along Shadow Creek to Ediza Lake and other areas along lateral trails. These places are the heart of Ansel Adams’ most iconic photography and have long needed comprehensive restoration.

The Kings Canyon project will begin in the Bullfrog Lake basin and proceed northward along the JMT to Woods Creek. Restoration work will include most of the near-level terrain around Bullfrog Lake, Rae Lakes, Dollar Lake, and the major trail junction at Woods Creek.

For this work, says Marla Stark: “The JMT Foundation is applying for a four-year funding plan through California – continued page 8 bottom

# An Immodest Proposal: Parks Without People

## What if we were to create nature preserves that were strictly for science?



-- by Jason Mark

The land mines have been good for the birds. In 1982, the Falkland Islands—a wind-lashed, nearly treeless archipelago 300 miles off the coast of South America—were the center of a brief war between Argentina and Great Britain. The British quickly reclaimed the territory, which long had been a British colony, [but] the Argentine military scattered some 20,000 land mines on the beaches behind them. The British left the beaches alone. In the process, they inadvertently created a nature preserve. Local penguins—the southern rockhopper, the macaroni, the jackass—are too light to trigger the mines, and they have thrived on the deserted beaches.

On the Mediterranean island of Cyprus, another demilitarized zone—110 miles separating warring Greek and Turkish factions—also functions as a refuge for endemic species like the Cyprus bee orchid, the Cyprus tulip, and the mouflon, a wild native sheep.

Land mines are a terrible way to go about creating wildlife habitat. But the way wildlife flourishes in the few spaces on Earth where most humans are afraid to go raises a provocative idea: What would happen if the United State were establish nature preserves that were off-limits to most people?

### John Muir Trail Foundation –from p 7

Proposition 68, the Parks, Environment, and Water Bond Act, approved by voters in 2018. For design and implementation, we will collaborate with Yosemite National Park and Yosemite Conservancy to extend their on-going wilderness restoration program as our base plan. With adequate private donor funding to supplement State funds, we will have a JMT Wilderness Restoration Plan ‘shovel-ready’ in August/September 2020 that will continue through 2023.”

To learn more about the John Muir Trail Foundation, and how you can help its efforts, go to <https://johnmuirtrailfoundation.org/> and <https://johnmuirtrailfoundation.org/donate/>. ♪

Even when human presence poses no obvious threat, it still often disrupts the behaviors of birds and beasts. A study published last year in *Science* found that mammalian species become more nocturnal when people are around. In an earlier study, researchers in Colorado found that birds like nuthatches and meadowlarks become scarcer around hiking trails. Even the quietest and most abstentious of hikers leave some trace.

There are already preserves in other countries that stringently limit human presence. The International Union for the Conservation of Nature lists hundreds of sites that meet its definition for a “strict nature preserve” that are “managed for relatively low visitation by humans.” Russia has some of the planet’s most strongly protected natural areas. Its 105 strict nature preserves—*zapovednik*—protect 85 million acres in which nature is left almost entirely to itself.

It’s time for government officials in the United States to consider something similar: preserves and parks in which nearly all kinds of human visitation would be prohibited. ...no tourists in RVs, no Strava-addicted trail runners, no anglers. Even the most experienced and conscientious backpackers and hiker wouldn’t be allowed in. Nor would amateur birdwatchers or wildlife photographers.

Given the state of environmental politics in the United States today and the Trump administration’s scorched-earth campaign against public lands, this proposal is, admittedly, a long shot. It’s still worth considering—if only to remind ourselves that conservation isn’t just about conserving natural resources for human use but also about protecting the homes of other species. Here, on the edge of the sixth mass extinction, it’s more urgent than ever to establish preserves that would be for wild nature alone.

That approach would be a major departure from the history and spirit of landscape conservation in the United States. Creating a U.S. nature preserve virtually off-limits to people would be a

tough sell. From their inception, American parks have prioritized the interests of people. Our parks are meant to be, in the words of the first national park legislation, “pleasuring grounds.”

Excluding people from wild areas is complicated by the fact that many national parks—like Yellowstone and Glacier—were created by keeping Native Americans out of their traditional hunting grounds. A wilderness occupied solely by other species, with no humans around at all, is something that hasn’t existed in most parts of North America for a very long time (if ever).

A totally unpeopled wilderness grounded in democratic consensus might be spectacular...but would still have to justify its existence to, well... people. Proponents would likely have to concede that, yes, a park without people would foreclose human desires for activities as wholesome as birdwatching and backpacking. In place of an outdoor playground, we’d have a living laboratory.

While U.S. parks and preserves have always been mostly about people, a biocentric ideal has long flowed through American conservation, an ideal that argues we should protect places for the benefit of other living beings. Just think of Thoreau and his line that “*what we call wilderness is a civilization other than our own.*” Or Aldo Leopold’s belief that the whole ecosystem including water, soil, plants, animals, and people—*has a “right to continued existence.”*

The establishment of people-less parks would recognize that right, and mark a grand gesture of ecological solidarity. Like any true solidarity, the giver gains in the course of the sacrifice. Preserving a place truly beyond us would, in the end, be a blessing to ourselves. ♪

(From an April 16, 2019 blog by Sierra magazine editor-in-chief Jason Mark.)



# Enough is Enough! No More Oil & Gas Leasing in Nevada!

-- by Brian Beffort

Under the Trump Administration's "Energy First" policy, oil & gas leasing has expanded dramatically in Nevada. More than one million acres of your public lands in Nevada have been offered up to the fossil fuel industry for exploration. Many of these parcels are immediately adjacent to some of the state's most spectacular places like Ruby Lakes National Wildlife Refuge, Great Basin National Park, the Ruby Mountains, the South Fork Band of the Te-Moak Tribe of Western Shoshone, and numerous wilderness areas and wilderness study areas. Many parcels now facing lease sales are directly on critical sage grouse habitat and mule deer migration corridors.

In the past two years, Nevada's BLM has offered more than 1.4 million acres in oil and gas sales but so far has sold only 10 percent of those acres; the majority at the minimum bid of \$2 an acre.

Whether they lease or not, responding to and processing these lease sales requires enormous amounts of BLM, Forest Service, and Nevada Department of Wildlife staff time-- and thus your tax dollars.

The history of oil and gas exploration in Nevada shows convincingly that Nevada doesn't have much oil. According to the BLM, the oil and gas industry on public lands in Nevada contributed \$3.1 million in total economic output in FY 2018 – far less than the resources spent processing expressions of interest to drill,

and not counting impacts to our habitat and other resources by exploration activities.

But even if Nevada were replete with oil, it is time to **#KeepItInTheGround.**

Climate disruption threatens the state with increasing droughts, heat waves, severe storms, decreasing agricultural productivity, more frequent and severe wildfires, a broader geographic reach and season for many diseases, and declining snowpack and water availability. Over the last two years, Reno and Las Vegas have ranked as two of the fastest-warming cities in the country. Las Vegas had at least 147 heat exposure deaths in 2017. It is a danger to future generations to continue drilling Nevada's public lands for oil and gas.

In contrast to federal efforts to drill, drill, drill, the state of Nevada has taken bold steps to divest from fossil fuels in our energy and economy. In his "State of the State" speech on January 16, new Governor Steve Sisolak said, *"I will not spend a single second debating the reality of climate change. Climate change is real, and it's irresponsible to ignore the science that proves it."*

Honoring this commitment to climate action, the Nevada Legislature passed—and Governor Sisolak signed—numerous pieces of legislation: to increase Nevada's renewable energy to 50 percent by 2030 and 100 percent by 2050; to document carbon emissions across all sectors, and recommend policies that could put Nevada on a pathway to zero carbon emissions

by 2050; to increase electric vehicle infrastructure and replace diesel school buses with electric; and to increase low-income access to solar power, to name the most significant bills.

In Congress, Nevada Senator Catherine Cortez Masto has introduced S. 258, the Ruby Mountains Protection Act, (see WOW April 2019) which would permanently withdraw approximately 450,000 acres of Forest Service lands from oil & gas leasing in the Ruby Mountains and nearby Humboldt Range. Unfortunately, the September and October planned sale has immediately adjacent BLM parcels on the auction block.

The Sierra Club is working hard to end oil and gas leasing on public lands in Nevada, and to transition our economy to one based on clean, healthy, environmentally sound renewable energy. The Administration's backward-leaning fossil-fuel leasing efforts are the last gasps of a dinosaur economy based on toxic fossil fuels. With your help, we can stop them.

## ⇨ WHAT YOU CAN DO:

Three Things You Can Do to Fight Oil & Gas Leasing in Nevada:

1. Wherever you live, sign this petition [link: <https://act.sierraclub.org/actions/National?actionId=AR0182220>] opposing upcoming oil & gas leases in Nevada.
2. Join Sierra Club on the ground for a Southern Nevada Citizen Science National Public Lands Day. (For details on this Mormon Mesa driving tour and campout see Outings, p. 12.) If you're interested, contact Our Wild America Organizer Christian Gerlach at [Christian.Gerlach@Sierraclub.org](mailto:Christian.Gerlach@Sierraclub.org) or (702)271-6485.
3. Nevadans, write Governor Steve Sisolak, using this link here. [<http://gov.nv.gov/ContacttheGovernor.aspx>] Ask him to use his powers to protect Nevada's wildlife, habitat, water, and outdoor recreation over give-aways to fossil fuel companies.

For more ideas about how to get involved, contact Christian Gerlach at the information above. ↻

(Brian Beffort is Toiyabe Chapter Director)



photo: Christian Gerlach

Southern Nevada Group picnic—with participants poised to take action against an expanded Administration effort to push quarterly oil and gas lease sales for Nevada's extensive public lands.

## A Global Deal for Nature: How to preserve half of the earth for nature and save ourselves

-- by Anne Henny

“Nature Needs Half”—the idea that we must protect and interconnect at least half of the Earth’s land and water to sustain the health and diversity of all life—was launched by the WILD Foundation in 2010 in a public website promoting it as an international movement <https://www.wild.org/natureneedshalf/>. But only very recently, after new dire warnings from international teams of ecosystem and climate scientists that our planetary life support systems are in jeopardy, has it gained real traction in the news media and policymaking realms.

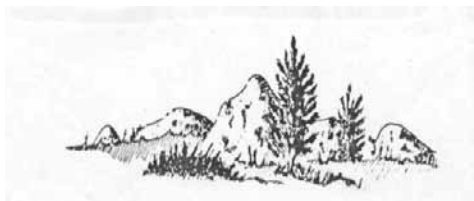
Harvey Locke of the Wild Foundation wrote in this newsletter (WOW, Aug 2010) on why the Nature Needs Half goal is both necessary and achievable: “Nature needs at least half of a given eco-region to be protected, and needs to be interconnected with other such areas, in order to maintain its full range of life-supporting, ecological and evolutionary processes, the long-term survival of the species that live there, and to ensure the system’s resilience.... Some ecosystems will require more than half.” Locke called for urgent protection for at least half of the remaining large, mostly intact wilderness areas (e.g., boreal forests, the Amazon Basin, and Antarctica) and surviving fragmented remnants of very high biological importance (e.g., Biodiversity hotspots, key biodiversity areas and Alliance for Zero Extinction sites.)

Nature Needs Half gained further momentum from conservation biologist E. O. Wilson’s 2016 book, *Half-Earth: Our Planet’s Fight for Life*. He proposes that we must preserve at least half the Earth’s surface for nature—to save the whole biosphere on which we humans, too, depend for survival. The Half-Earth prescription for saving the biosphere and Wilson’s maxim, “do no further harm to the rest of life,” are gaining adherents.

Evidence is piling up that our interrelated extinction, climate, and humanitarian crises are escalating and

we are running out of time. In October 2018, the U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Special Report warned that the Paris Accord global warming target of 2°C above pre-industrial levels is too high; humanity must reduce its climate-damaging activities to stay below 1.5°C, or face catastrophic climate disruptions. Drastic improvement is needed within 12 years—by 2030. <https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/> This means that effective international agreements must be put in place at the forthcoming 2019 UN Climate Change Conference, or at the latest by 2020.

Public awareness is growing that greenhouse gas emissions from fossil fuel use—in transportation, industry, and other modern activities—disrupt the climate. Less widely understood is that our overexploitation of land, water and wildlife is also a major contributor to the climate and biodiversity crises. Healthy oceans, fresh water systems including wetlands and lakes, forests, grasslands, deserts and other natural places store carbon



and can remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. They support a diversity of life and help moderate temperatures and buffer communities from the impacts of extreme weather.

When natural communities are destroyed or degraded, their stored carbon is released into the atmosphere, exacerbating climate change. At the same time, other life-giving processes and creatures, many not yet known by science, are permanently lost. Yet our consumption of natural plant and animal communities keeps on accelerating. And despite ongoing efforts of conservationists worldwide, only about 15 percent of the world’s

lands and five percent of oceans are now formally protected.

In May 2019 the IPBES Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, warned that a million plant and animal species are at risk of extinction—many within decades—from human activities. Populations of wild creatures are in decline, and extinction rates are accelerating. Loss of species can cause ecosystem collapse, compromising nature’s ability to provide vital services to people. The IPBES Assessment was compiled by 145 expert authors from 50 countries, who reviewed more than 15,000 scientific papers, <https://www.ipbes.net/news/Media-Release-Global-Assessment>. (IPBES stands for Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, an organization open to United Nations members.)

The litany of dire news may lead some to despair, but others are springing to action individually and collectively. The Global Climate Strikes, inspired by Swedish youth activist Greta Thunberg, and the Extinction Rebellion which started in Britain and is galvanizing activists across the world, are just two examples. Social justice and environmental organizations are adding urgency to their work. Sierra Club continues elevating environmental justice and social equity, embracing the Jemez Principles for Democratic Organizing <https://www.sierraclub.org/planet/2017/10/sierra-club-and-jemez-principles>, helping shape the Green New Deal <https://www.sierraclub.org/trade/green-new-deal>, and signing on to the Equitable and Just Climate Platform <https://ajustclimate.org/about.html>. And as always, grassroots Sierra Club activists across the nation are working with allies to protect nature and communities.

The Global Deal For Nature (GDN) links climate and biodiversity solutions. It targets 30 percent of Earth to be formally protected and another 20 percent designated as climate stabilization areas, by 2030, to stay below 1.5°C. The GDN strategy is to conserve natural habitats

-- continued page 11, bottom

## Wilderness and Bicycles Electric Assist Mountain Bikes: Part 2:

### e-Bike Implications for land management

-- by Geoffrey Smith

In Part 1 of this two-part series, (see WOW, April 2019) I offered an e-mountain bike (eMTB) primer. I talked about e-bike technologies and got people thinking about the implications. If you've ventured out onto public land since then, perhaps you are now better able to recognize and understand the varieties of bicycles you see out there.

Mountain bikes and other machines are not allowed in Wilderness under existing federal law. The conversation about mountain bicycles on non-Wilderness land is relevant to the extent that many of the lands which cyclists use or wish to use are potential Wilderness, or are adjacent to Wilderness, so there is a natural 'spillover' concern.

The essence of a "bicycle" is that it is human-powered -- not so with an e-bike. Recent developments in electric bicycle propulsion technology have brought these machines to a new level. They are now truly 'motorized vehicles', just without the gas and oil. So what does this mean for the integrity of our public lands resources? Answer: It means that as guardians of our public lands natural resources, we need to be informed and proactive in our advocacy for effective regulation of these machines. We need to step up our support of the agency land managers

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**Global Deal for Nature** --from page 10 (terrestrial, freshwater and marine) through an ecoregion-based approach, with a rapid reduction in land conversion and a moratorium by about 2035 along with ecological restoration in many areas.

Conservation *has* been working --just not fast enough. We need to aim higher. The Global Deal For Nature is an important step in moving "Nature Needs Half" from idea to reality. <https://advances.sciencemag.org/content/advances/5/4/eaaw2869.full.pdf> Stay tuned -- meanwhile you can sign the petition at <https://www.globaldealornature.org/petition/en/> ♪

-- those on-the-ground stewards who see first-hand the impacts that recreational activities have on Nature.

Mountain bike organizations have advocated with land managers for increased bicycle access for decades. And the impacts of mountain bikes on our public lands and wildlife resources have been debated for decades. We can continue to debate until the proverbial 'cows come home', but the reality is that the known and documented impacts of mountain bikes -- soil erosion, proliferation of trails, impacts to wildlife, -- are amplified by the addition of electric motors. eMTBs travel faster, farther, more quietly, and with greater impact to the soils and fauna than so-called 'acoustic' (non-motorized) MTBs. Add to that the fact that yet more eMTB riders will be traveling on two wheels (not to mention three-wheeled recumbent trikes) into sensitive lands. As if that were not enough, we are now seeing a proliferation of so-called 'gravel bikes' and 'cyclo-cross bikes', which are 'road' bikes with fatter tires but no shock absorbers. Throw some bags on them, and now you have 'bike packing', the newest craze in off-road extended travel recreation. And--what totally new machines may in future be out there?

To view Sierra Club policies on off road vehicles on public lands, and on off-road use of bicycles, go to: <https://www.sierraclub.org/policy/road-use-motorized-vehicles>; <https://www.sierraclub.org/policy/road-use-bicycles>

A good resource for assessing the land management implications for eMTBs, admittedly from a pro-bicycle perspective, is the national People for Bikes organization. This organization is a strong advocate for bicycles as transportation and recreation, both on-road and off-road. In my conversations with them both as a rider and a bicycle shop owner myself, I have been clear about my own concerns concerning expansion of the 'multi-use' approach to public lands trails design. Bicycle infrastructure on paved surfaces surely deserves improvements in design and

capital investment. However, when talk turns to off-pavement recreation on public lands, the conversation must be very different since land management mandates are clearly unique, and focused on resource protection.

I urge the reader to review this People for Bikes on-line resource at



PowerflyLT99\_19\_27119\_a carbon full suspension electric mountain bike-- [www.trekbikes.com](http://www.trekbikes.com)

<https://peopleforbikes.org/our-work/e-bikes/for-land-managers/>. You will find a trove of information about how public lands are being managed throughout the U.S. relative to recreational bicycle use. In many cases, land management policies are only just now being updated to reflect the growth of MTB and eMTB use in these areas. ***You need to be at the table for these discussions.***

Finally, know that personal relationships are very important. Connect with your local land managers, whether city, county, state, or federal. Get to know them personally. Work with these dedicated staff to help organize fellow volunteers to work on service projects focused on restoration, interpretation and yes even 'volunteer trail' eradication. The managers--recreation staff, biologists, district rangers, information officers--need to know that non-mountain bike riders are organized, too! ♪

*(Geoffrey Smith has been actively involved in federal wilderness advocacy for over 25 years, having organized around the first California Desert Protection Act and the California Wild Heritage Campaign. He now lives in Santa Rosa where he has settled into owning and operating a bicycle shop specializing in folding bikes... including non-motorized folding mountain bikes.)*



# 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 (as quoted in Range of Light Group newsletter)

## Nearby Nature

Sept 11 -- Wed

### San Gabriels Icehouse Canyon/Saddle

Join us for 8 mi rt, 2600' gain in San Gabriel Mtns along an inviting creek, past private cabins and through beautiful forests. Snack stop at Columbine Spring, lunch at Saddle and return same way. Meet 7:15 am at Tustin Rideshare (one block south of I-5 on Redhill in parking lot on north side of Stater Bros). Bring 2+ liters water, lunch/snacks, lugsoles, poles, rain jacket, Level: Moderate. Rain cancels. Orange County Group Ldr: Sharon Kirk (714)376-3197, sl.kirk@sbcglobal.net; Asst: Linda Ledger (949)444-1285, linda.ledger@me.com.

Two special Nevada service outings planned for Public Lands Day!

Sept 28 -- Sat (optional Sun)

### Walker River Stewardship Project

Join this volunteer stewardship project on both National and Nevada Public Lands Day at the Walker River State Recreation Area south of Yerington—planting native shrubs in what used to be an alfalfa field--restoring habitat for wildlife. The project is the result of a new partnership between the Walker Basin Conservancy, Nevada State Parks, and the Sierra Club. (The state park includes a lot of private lands that are being transferred to public domain.) Enjoy a weekend of camping along the scenic East Walker River, talks from experts, great birding, hikes along the river, an afternoon barbecue (main dish provided), and great camaraderie! Stay the whole weekend, or come just for the day. Volunteers needed, especially outings leaders who can help organize activities. If you can help, contact Brian Beffort, (775)848-7783.

Sept 28-29 -- Sat-Sun

### Nevada Citizen Science Survey

Join us for a Southern Nevada Public Lands Day driving tour, camp-out and citizen science survey as we explore the Paiute/Mormon Mesa. We will explore the area to the east of the Mormon Mountains and north of Mesquite along Rainbow Pass Road, Tule Well Road, and Tule Spring Road all the way to Summit Springs and the Ribbons (Lincoln and Clark Counties). No strenuous hiking

planned, but we will stop along the way to stretch our legs and survey various areas for plants, animals, and anything else that can help us stop the proposed oil and gas drilling that currently threatens our Southern Nevada public lands and waters. Map link to route: <http://bit.ly/NVPLD19>. Level: Easy. Cost: Free of Charge. Bring: Overnight camping gear. Hiking level depends on participants. For more info or to sign up, contact trip leader: Sierra Club National Our Wild America Organizer Christian Gerlach ([christian.gerlach@sierraclub.org](mailto:christian.gerlach@sierraclub.org), (702)271-6485).

October 12-13th

### Ventana: Pine Ridge trail

Ventana Wilderness Alliance offers this combined backpack and work on the Pine Ridge Trail from Terrace Creek Camp. A good introduction to backpacking and trailwork. The trail has been closed since this section of the trail burned completely in 2016. We hope to have a crosscut saw team clear trees also. Sign up at <https://www.meetup.com/Ventana-Wilderness-Alliance-Meetup/events/263747139/?isFirstPublish=true>. For more info, contact Betsy MacGowan, [bmacgowan@hotmail.com](mailto:bmacgowan@hotmail.com).

Oct 12 - 14 -- Sat-Mon

### Trinity Alps Fall Backpack

Join S. F. Bay Chapter Backpacking Section trip to northern CA Trinity Alps Wilderness. We'll hike the long canyon of Stuart Fork to Emerald and Sapphire Lakes in the Trinity Alps. Our first day will take us about 8.5 miles to base camp in Morris Meadows. Then day-hike about 12 miles rt. on Day 2 to beautiful Emerald and Sapphire Lakes. On Day 3 head back to trailhead. Individual commissary. Bear canister required. Group limited to 10. Level: Moderate(2BT), Cost: \$45, Sign-up at <https://act.sierraclub.org/events/details?formcampaignid=7010Z000001vsSAQAY&mapLinkHref=https://maps.google.com/maps&daddr=Trinity%20Alps%20Fall%20Backpacking%20Trip@40.873358,-122.918042>. Ldrs: Michael Bandrowski, [mike.bandrowski@gmail.com](mailto:mike.bandrowski@gmail.com), (510)834-3235; Sanjay Reddy, [reddysanjay@comcast.net](mailto:reddysanjay@comcast.net); (925)828-3229.

## TRIP REPORT

Some of us in the California/Nevada Wilderness Committee can't think of a better way to spend the Memorial Day weekend in late May than in a wilderness area--or camping just at the edge of wilderness for a service project to help the managing agency take care of our wilderness.

So -- over the past Memorial Day, that is just what we did. We helped the Bureau of Land Management wilderness staff from the Ely, Nevada office, with a project in White Pine County's Goshute Canyon Wilderness, established in 2006. A fire in 2018 had ruined a small campground tucked into the canyon at the edge of the remote wilderness some 35 miles north of Ely, and we helped rebuild the campsite as well as with some seeding of native brush on the hillsides above.

A good group enjoyed working with longtime wilderness ranger John Miller, and new ranger in the field, Robert Valenzuela--in spite of unseasonably cold weather--*brrrr*--punctuated by intermittent rain squalls. Luckily John and Robert brought extra tents and tarp shelters.

We first worked with John in 2009, when he was new in Ely, and have enjoyed a decade of eastern Nevada service trips with him--with multiple campouts in the Mount Grafton, Highland Ridge, and Becky Peak Wildernesses, and one in the Weepah Spring Wilderness at the edge of the Basin and Range National Monument.

But our wilderness service trips with the Ely BLM began even earlier--when, right after passage of the 2004 Lincoln County Conservation Act, we began helping in the new Mormon Mountains Wilderness, in southern Lincoln County. There were also projects in the Meadow Valley Range and Delamar Wildernesses. ♪ (vnh)



Restoring Goshute Canyon campground with BLM staff

photo: Susanna Murphy

# Pumped storage projects raise concerns in Eastern Sierra

-- by Fran Hunt

Beginning in early April of this year, conservationists in the Eastern Sierra have faced a disturbing development - a company (Premium Energy Holdings, LLC) with possible ties to the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP) has proposed two pumped storage energy projects which would impact significant Native American cultural areas, designated or potential



Haiwee Pumped Storage Project threatens Haiwee Canyon, potential addition to South Sierra Wilderness, Inyo National Forest.

wilderness, and important fish and wildlife habitats on both BLM and national forest lands in Inyo and Mono County.

(Pumped storage involves two connected water reservoirs, one at a higher elevation than the other. During times of low energy demand/high energy production, water is pumped up-slope and stored in the upper reservoir. Then, when additional energy is required, the water is released (through pipes or tunnels) downhill to the lower reservoirs, powering turbines to generate electricity along the way. Still, such energy storage generates less energy overall than it took to store it.)

Premium Energy has applied to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) for preliminary permits for these two projects. If granted, these preliminary permits would put the company first in line for such a project and give them three to five years to gather data and study the project's feasibility, environmental impacts, and other factors and prepare an hydropower facility license application. Preliminary permits do not authorize land-disturbing activities or construction.

On April 1, Premium Energy filed its initial preliminary permit application for the Owens Valley Pumped Storage Project (OVPS) in northern Inyo County-southern Mono County. As originally

proposed, this alarming project involved the creation of dams and reservoirs on Wheeler Ridge, within the John Muir Wilderness.

Local residents of Swall Meadows and Paradise were also extremely disturbed by the prospects of high elevation dams in a seismically active area directly above their communities. This original application was rife with other environmental and public safety concerns. Important wildlife species such as mule deer and bighorn sheep were clearly at risk, as were cultural resources and free flowing local waterways.

Since April, key decisions made by FERC and the active expressions of concern by the Sierra Club Range of Light Group and other conservationists have forced the company to revise its project, which now no longer directly impacts existing designated wilderness.

Premium Energy's latest amended preliminary permit application instead seeks to use the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power's (DWP) existing Crowley Lake Reservoir in Mono County as the project's upper reservoir.

The new application also identified three other alternative upper reservoir sites as follows: 1) in the Owens River Gorge, some distance downstream of Crowley Lake, or in priority wilderness-quality areas near either 2) Silver Canyon or 3) Gunter Canyon in the White Mountains on the Inyo-Mono County line (and therefore outside of the existing White Mountain Wilderness). The only proposed lower reservoir site is in the Owens River Gorge just upstream from DWP's existing Pleasant Valley Reservoir.

A FERC July 17 letter indicates that FERC may be likely to allow the Owens Valley project to move ahead to a 60 day public comment period. Subsequently, local Eastern Sierra advocates attended--via a remote video link--the July 23 meeting of the Board of Water and Power Commission, which establishes policy for DWP. Advocates pressed for answers on the department's past interactions with and interest in the Owens Valley project. Spokesmen took care to distance DWP from any engagement or interest in the project and promised to update local communities with further details.

The FERC identifier for the OVPS is Docket number P-14996. (Find additional project information by entering the project's docket number on this FERC web page--where interested persons can also comment on projects and sign up for project updates.)

The preliminary permit application for Premium Energy's second project, the Haiwee Pumped Storage Project near Olancha in southern Inyo County, was first filed in early May. (FERC Docket number P-14991). The Haiwee project would use water from the Los Angeles Aqueduct and would construct two new reservoirs. At first, the company identified alternative upper reservoir sites in either the Coso Range Wilderness or the South Sierra Wilderness. After environmentalists voiced strong concerns pointing out the incursion, FERC rejected the application, and Premium Energy was forced to amend its Haiwee project. We are still reviewing the latest application, but we do know that its upper reservoir site in the Haiwee Canyon west of Highway 395 would impact the conservationists' proposed addition to the South Sierra Wilderness. The project's two other possible upper reservoirs east of Highway 395 would probably impact the BLM's Mohave Ground Squirrel Area of Critical Environmental Concern and places significant to Native American tribes in the Eastern Sierra.

Climate change and the transition to a clean, renewable energy economy is the existential threat--and opportunity --of our time, and the Sierra Club is fully committed to this transition. Pumped storage projects can be a vital clean energy tool, in areas with existing infrastructure and on already altered or disturbed lands, not in special places with high cultural significance to Native American tribes; or recommended wilderness, Wilderness Study Areas, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, national forest roadless areas; or vital habitats for at risk species. We cannot overlook such serious impacts.

Stay tuned for new information on Eastern Sierra pumped storage. ~

(Fran Hunt is Sierra Club Eastern Sierra Organizer)

## Sierra Club Celebrates the Lost Coast



photo: Sandy Miles BLM

Sierra Club Lost Coast volunteers

In late May, BLM's California newsletter "NewsBytes" highlighted the work of a Sierra Club outing in the BLM's King Range Wilderness--giving a "Big thanks to the Sierra Club volunteers helping on the Lost Coast Trail, working on trail building and marine debris cleanup. They even moved a refrigerator off the beach and carried a big red kayak 4 miles to Black Sands Beach for removal!" (BLM California Facebook)

## Newly Discovered Plant Named for Native Americans

Botanists on California's North Coast have discovered a new low-growing, flowering plant and named it for Native American people whose ancestral lands include the area where the plant grows. The plant was discovered growing within the South Fork Eel Wilderness and the Red Mountain area; both are public land sites within the County of Mendocino and managed by the Bureau of Land Management Arcata Field Office. It will now be known as Wailaki lomatium (*Lomatium kogholiini*). (BLM California Facebook)



## California Biodiversity Initiative

A growing number of leaders and Californians now recognize the importance of California's flora, thanks in large part to the 2010 California State Assembly Resolution 173, which established the third week of April as California Native Plant Week.

Last year, the state of California took formal steps to protect and restore California's unusual biodiversity by launching the California Biodiversity Initiative. The initiative provides state funding and a seven-part roadmap to guide state agencies and partners in their work on behalf of California's native plants and wildlife. In support of the effort, hundreds of biodiversity scientists have signed onto A Charter to Secure the Future of California's Native Biodiversity, which defined the vision for California's Biodiversity Initiative.

Learn more about California's native plants and ways you can help at [cnps.org/nativeplantweek](http://cnps.org/nativeplantweek).

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.

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"We have not only learned more about the ocean in the last five decades than during all preceding human history, we've lost more. We've taken more. We've destroyed more than during all preceding history, because we have the power to do so.

With our pressure, as never before, a single species is altering the nature of nature. We're not doing it over millions of years, or even thousands of years. We're doing it in decades."

-- Sylvia Earle, in *Albuquerque New Mexico, at 2014 Wilderness50 Conference*