

# WORDS OF *the* WILD

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

## **Thirty by Thirty--an interim goal toward protecting Half of Nature**

-- by Anne Henny

In the last issue of WOW we explored the “Nature Needs Half” idea—why for our own survival, people must stop destroying nature, protect what is left, and restore what is possible. (<https://www.sierraclub.org/sites/www.sierraclub.org/files/WOW-August-2019.pdf>, pp 10-11). We touched on how an ecoregion-based approach like the “Global Deal For Nature” could, when combined with effective global climate agreements, help avert catastrophic species loss and societal disruption. Now we cover where the Sierra Club stands on all this, how it might be implemented in the U.S., and related issues needing our engagement.

Increasingly, scientists and conservationists are calling on governments to protect 30 percent of the Earth’s natural lands and waters by 2030 (known as 30x30), and then work up to half by 2050. However,

others, such as the Nature Needs Half Coalition, warn we must reach 50 percent by 2030 to avert an extinction crisis, help reverse global heating, and conserve life-giving ecosystem services such as clean air, water and food security for people

### ***Where Sierra Club Stands On Nature Needs Half***

As announced in an August 13, 2019 press release, Sierra Club joined “Nature Needs Half”, an international coalition of environmental organizations, scientists, indigenous peoples, and business leaders working to protect 50 percent of Earth’s lands and seas. “Both the Sierra Club and Nature Needs Half hope that their alliance will encourage political and business leaders to take advantage of a narrowing window-of-opportunity to transform humanity’s relationship with the natural world for the benefit of life on Earth. Their alliance is formed in advance of two United Nations’ conventions scheduled in 2020, addressing both the climate and biodiversity crisis.” <https://www.sierraclub.org/press-releases/2019/08/sierra-club-nature-needs-half-join-forces-protect-half-planet>.

People ask: *HOW* do we define “protection” of lands? Sierra Club is currently using standards of U.S.



Geological Survey GAP categories 1 and 2: lands that have permanent protection from conversion and are managed to maintain a primarily natural state. (But category 2 may receive uses or management practices that degrade the quality of existing natural communities, including suppression of natural disturbance.) We need to consider if this qualifies as genuine protection.

As an interim step toward protecting and restoring 50 percent of the planet, Sierra Club’s Our Wild America (OWA) volunteers and staff plan to launch a campaign to advance the 30x30 goal in the U.S. It would build on the Sierra Club’s ongoing conservation and restoration work by staff, Chapters, Groups, Grassroots Network Team volunteers, and partnerships with other organizations. -- continued page 2

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A Sierra Club 30x30 Campaign would be timely: analysis by the Center for American Progress (CAP) shows broad bipartisan public support for stronger conservation measures--85 percent of voters support significantly increasing the amount of protected lands and ocean areas in the U.S. The U.S. ranks as one of the top five countries in the world for total amount of wilderness-quality land. Yet only 12 percent of the country's land area is in national parks, wilderness areas, permanent conservation easements, state parks, national wildlife refuges, national monuments, or other protected areas. And, although 26 percent of U.S. ocean is protected, that area is almost entirely in the remote western Pacific Ocean or northwestern Hawaii. No section of U.S. waters in the Gulf of Mexico, the mid-Atlantic, or the North Pacific is fully protected from extractive uses.

In October, a group of non-governmental organizations including Sierra Club sent an *Open Letter to All Presidential Candidates* stating that "the scope and scale of America's nature crisis demands that every presidential candidate's policy platform provide clear and concrete proposals to better protect and restore lands, waters, and wildlife for the benefit and enjoyment of all people and future generations." The signers advocated for "strong, inclusive, and ambitious plans" promoting equity, an end to fossil fuel extraction from public lands, and advancing a national 30x30 goal. The Letter said, "Rather than a one-size-fits-all approach, pursuing a 30x30 goal must be done in a way that recognizes the geographic, social, and cultural diversity of the country; advances national, regional, and locally-tailored conservation solutions; and better supports the stewardship efforts of private landowners and the private sector. It is vital that a president conduct formal consultation with tribal nations on a 30x30 goal and support tribal communities achieving a paired conservation and natural resource vision." Many of the Democratic

presidential candidates have incorporated a 30x30 framework into their policy platforms, and some members of Congress are promoting it. <https://www.wilderness.org/articles/article/open-letter-all-presidential-candidates>

### ***How To Protect 30-50 percent Of U.S. Natural Lands And Waters***

An obvious, yet difficult step toward protecting or restoring up to 50 percent of



U.S. lands and waters is to stop degrading and destroying them. This means ending fossil fuel extraction on federal lands and waters, and strengthening sustainable management practices on grasslands, arid lands, national forests, and marine areas. Protections being dismantled by the current administration such as the Endangered Species Act and the Roadless Rule must be defended and restored. And new incentives and programs must be created to prevent losses of natural carbon storage in forests, wetlands and other ecosystems.

In its report, *How Much Nature Should America Keep?* CAP shows that we are losing one million acres per year of natural lands: "...human activities are causing the persistent and rapid loss of America's natural areas. The human footprint in the continental United States grew by more than 24 million acres from 2001 to 2017—equivalent to the loss of roughly a football field worth of natural area every 30 seconds. If national trends continue, a South Dakota-sized expanse of forests, wetlands, and wild places in the continental United States will disappear by 2050." And U.S. losses parallel similar destruction of species and natural habitats at the global scale. (CAP, *How Much Nature Should America Keep?* August 6, 2019. <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/green/reports/2019/08/06/473242/much-nature-america-keep/#fn-473242-6>)

CAP data shows that about 60

percent of lands in the continental U.S. are still in a largely natural condition or could plausibly be restored to a natural condition. Reaching a 30 percent threshold requires policy changes at key federal agencies and congressional action. State and local government lands offer opportunities where Sierra Club Chapters and activist teams can help achieve local conservation gains.

Sierra Club can also support efforts of Tribal partners and allies to conserve tribal lands and should prioritize areas with high conservation values such as biodiversity, migration corridors, strong ecological integrity, and ecosystem representation.

Large portions of U.S. federal lands are still in a relatively natural, but unprotected, condition. According to the Wilderness Society, about 90 percent of Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands are open for extractive uses. If extractive uses were limited to ten percent of BLM land, an additional 194 million acres could be protected.

Similarly, only about 25 percent of National Forest land is permanently protected. CAP estimates that if extractive activities (such as mining, oil and gas drilling, and logging) were limited to ten percent of currently unprotected national forest lands, another 129 million acres could be protected. An urgent priority of the Sierra Club is to defend the Roadless Rule, which covers 58 million acres of national forest lands, but only eight million of these already have protected status. CAP also estimates that an additional 15 million acres of Fish and Wildlife Service land (12 million acres of it in Alaska), six million acres of Department of Defense lands, 78 million acres of State and local lands, ten million acres of Tribal lands, and 35 million acres of private lands could be protected.

### ***Issues Needing Our Engagement***

A few years ago, the OWA Campaign surveyed Chapters and Grassroots Network teams and found that across the

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## 30 x 30 Campaign -- from page 2

country they were engaged in lands, water and wildlife work that would fit the 30x30 Campaign. Now the OWA plans to gather further information from Chapters and activists about their priorities and ideas for building a successful 30x30 Campaign. So watch for that survey in the coming year.

As the 30x30 Campaign develops, activists can also help address key issues that are not yet fully defined. Here are a few examples:

- *Timing* – is 30x30 ambitious enough, or should Sierra Club join others in the Nature Needs Half movement promoting 50 percent by 2030? Scientists advancing A Global Deal For Nature argue that “Opportunities to address both climate change and the extinction crisis are time bound. If current trends in habitat conversion and emissions do not peak by 2030, then it will become impossible to remain below 1.5°C. Similarly, if current land conversion rates, poaching of large animals, and other threats are not markedly slowed or halted in the next 10 years, ‘points of no return’ will be reached for multiple ecosystems and species.” <https://advances.sciencemag.org/content/5/4/eaaw2869>.
- *Ecosystem and species representation* – the preliminary approach outlined by CAP and OWA relies heavily on protecting available public lands located mainly in the western U.S. and Alaska. How can ecosystem and biodiversity values nationwide be given prominence?
- *Clean energy development* – in the context of the 30x30 Campaign, should Sierra Club continue promoting clean energy development on public lands generally, or strongly advocate for restricting those projects to already-developed or degraded sites?
- *Restoration* – Logging, mining, development, and other activities have left many ecosystems in a degraded state. How can restoration programs be incorporated into a 30x30 Campaign to reflect local priorities, benefit species, and help communities adapt to climate disruptions?

Stay tuned for more discussion of 30x30 in future issues of WOW. ∞

## Building the Alabama Hills National Scenic Area Management Plan

BLM and the public begin planning to guide the future of the Alabama Hills.

--- by Bryan Hatchell, Friends of the Inyo

The March, 2019, John Dingell Conservation, Management and Recreation Act established the Alabama Hills as a National Scenic Area. (see WOW, April 2019) The Alabama Hills are in the Owens Valley on the east side of the Sierra Nevada, only a few miles west of the town of Lone Pine. In recent months we have celebrated this long-fought-for designation, and now we decide together how BLM will manage the Alabama Hills for us and the generations to come.

Language in the 2019 John Dingell Conservation, Management and Recreation Act states that the BLM must “develop a comprehensive plan for the long-term management of the Scenic Area”. With the drafting of this plan comes the opportunity for the public to get involved... That means you!

The BLM needs the public’s help in determining how to continue existing recreational uses in a manner that preserves the values of the Scenic Area. Step one in building this plan is the “scoping” process. Scoping allows the public, agencies, businesses, nonprofits and more to comment on what values and concerns they would like to see reflected in the management plan. A few topics that are sure to be highlighted in the scoping period include camping regulations, the possibility of toilets and their location, collaboration between partners like Alabama Hills Stewardship Group and the Lone Pine Paiute Shoshone Tribe, and much more.

The fragility of the area must be a strict management consideration even as the Alabama Hills come under increased pressure from unchecked recreational use. No matter what ideas you submit in your comments, it helps to be specific! Comments with detail help the BLM interpret and implement your suggestions.



photo: Friends of the Inyo

### ▷ WHAT YOU CAN DO:

**Please comment by December 23!**

The 30-day public scoping comment period for the proposed management plan opened on Thursday, Nov. 21, and ends on Monday, Dec. 23.

### How To Submit Your Comments

- Email to BLM: [blm\\_ca\\_alabama\\_hills\\_planning@blm.gov](mailto:blm_ca_alabama_hills_planning@blm.gov).
- Hardcopy Mail: BLM Bishop Field Office, Attn: Alabama Hills Management Plan, 351 Pacu Lane, Suite 100, Bishop, CA 93514.

Find the News Release and Scoping Comment Sheet online at <https://eplanning.blm.gov/epl-front-office/eplanning/planAndProjectSite.do?methodName=dispatchToPatternPage&currentPageId=200008409&eType=EmailBlastContent&eId=9ab2078b-2d17-41d6-a638-5b03b430158e>. ∞

**The Next meeting of the California/Nevada Wilderness Committee will be February 8 and 9, 2020, in Shoshone, CA—annual joint meeting with CA/NV Desert Committee.**

Join us for fun, networking, awesome insights on wild topics. Meet agency staff, meet the young SCA work crews. Happy hour and potluck dinner Sat. Scenic desert ambience; camp or accommodation nearby. All interested wildlands friends welcome. Contact Anne Henny: [anneth16@sbcglobal.net](mailto:anneth16@sbcglobal.net), or Terry Frewin: [terrylf09@gmail.com](mailto:terrylf09@gmail.com).

## Draft Legislation to take over Nevada's Desert National Wildlife Refuge



Sharon Schaefer

The Department of Defense (DoD) is developing legislation to take over more than two-thirds of Desert National Wildlife Refuge in Nevada for military training. According to the Washington Post, the draft bill would expand the Nevada Test and Training Range (NTTR) at Nellis Air Force Base onto irreplaceable refuge habitat, strip the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) of its primary authority to conserve wildlife and prioritize aerial gunnery, rocketry, laser targeting and other destructive combat exercises across these public lands, effectively converting nearly 1.1 million acres of the largest national wildlife refuge in the Lower 48 into a war zone. This proposal to *permanently* expand military use and control over Desert Refuge would subvert fundamental environmental laws, destroy natural resources, threaten imperiled species, thwart proposed wilderness designation and block public access and tribal use of this vital landscape. (WOW, April 2019, Aug & Dec 2018, Dec 2017)

### Refuge Sections of DoD draft bill

The DoD's proposed legislation would amend the National Defense Authorization Act.

Section 2981 of the draft bill would provide the Air Force with approximately 3.26 million acres of public lands in Southern Nevada: the current NTTR plus a 300,000-acre expansion. This includes 846,000 acres of Desert Refuge currently co-managed with the FWS, plus a 260,000-acre expansion onto Refuge habitat that encompasses much of the scenic, biologically diverse Sheep Range, valued for public recreation and indigenous access. This provision reserves the entire area for Air Force use for ground-disturbing training activities.

Section 2983 would transfer primary management authority over the nearly 1.1 million acres of Desert Refuge from the FWS to the Air Force for military purposes, rendering these lands *a refuge in name only*. It would undermine the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act, making

### -- from Defenders of Wildlife

military purposes superior to the wildlife conservation purposes for which the refuge was established. It would also bar wilderness management for more than 1.3 million acres of proposed, agency-recommended refuge wilderness. Sections 2981 and 2983 would close the affected refuge lands to the public for safety reasons.

Section 2984 would establish a powerless and easily politicized inter-governmental executive committee for exchanging management "advice" on natural and cultural resources within the NTTR without requiring members to have any scientific or wildlife-related expertise.

Section 2985 would require the Department of the Interior and the DoD to develop land management plans for the transferred area that support military purposes regardless of wildlife mandates.

Finally, Section 2986(b) would authorize use of the Desert Refuge for war games indefinitely, eliminate National Environmental Policy Act requirements for public participation in decisions, and prevent Congress from reevaluating disposition of these public wildlands every 20 years, as happens now.

### Expansion of the Nevada Test and Training Range

The current legislative withdrawal for the NTTR expires in 2021. As required for renewing its withdrawal of the public domain, the Air Force conducted a controversial public planning process that produced a Final Legislative Environmental Impact Statement (LEIS) in October 2018. This inadequate, scientifically deficient LEIS is the basis for the military's legislation, which the Secretary of Interior must submit to Congress along with his withdrawal recommendation by May 2020.

The Trump administration has begun inter-agency negotiations on the DoD's draft bill. However, the fate of this refuge ultimately rests with the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress. Proposed legislation could likely be included in the National Defense Authorization Act for FY 2021 next year.

Amidst the ongoing battle over oil drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska, border wall construction through Lower Rio Grande Valley and

Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife

Refuges in the Southwest, and other attacks on refuges across the country, the military's bid to take over Desert Refuge is yet another existential threat to the integrity of America's National Wildlife Refuge System.

### The Controversy: Irreplaceable Wildlife and Cultural Values at Risk

A broad range of constituencies has raised vociferous opposition to the military's effort to commandeer two-thirds of Desert Refuge. The Nevada state legislature enacted a resolution opposing the expansion of the NTTR. The Moapa Band of Paiutes passed a tribal resolution against any further military incursion into the refuge, as did the Las Vegas Band of Paiutes, and even the Chemehuevi out of Havasu City California. Southern Nevada Congressman Steven Horsford spoke out strongly against the military takeover proposal; he stated, "I will do everything in my power to preserve this untouched habitat and biodiverse landscape for the people of Nevada." Veterans have protested; the activist group Veterans for Peace conducted a vigorous rally at Nellis Air Force base, protesting expansion into the Desert Refuge. Several democratic presidential candidates, including Senators Warren and Booker, have publically supported protecting these federal lands from increased military use.

Encompassing six mountain ranges and nearly 1.6 million acres, Desert Refuge conserves intact habitat for diverse wildlife. President Franklin D. Roosevelt first established the refuge in 1936 to protect bighorn sheep, which were nearing extinction early last century. With about 750 individuals today, bighorns remain vulnerable to disturbance. The refuge is also in the ancestral homeland of Native American tribes and preserves irreplaceable cultural resources and tribal history. ☞

(Sierra Club staffer Christian Gerlach also provided information for this article.)



## Condors take flight with LightHawk

-- by Christine Steele

It's not unusual to get a text update from one of our volunteer pilots the day before a LightHawk flight, although in this case it required more attention than usual. The VIP passenger on this LightHawk mission was one California condor male, bird number 138, being taken from The Peregrine Fund's World Center for Birds of Prey in Boise, Idaho, to a new home and a new potential mate at the Los Angeles Zoo. High winds were raking the Los Angeles basin with gusts up to 70 miles an hour--not favorable conditions for landing a single-engine aircraft.

Usually, this would mean rescheduling the flight for another day. Luckily, just over the ridge to the east, conditions were much calmer. After a couple of quick phone calls, volunteer pilot Wayne McClelland of Santa Barbara and Los Angeles Zoo Condor Keeper Mike Clark decided on a new meeting place: instead of Van Nuys Airport, not far from the Los Angeles Zoo, Wayne would pilot his Diamond Star DA-40 to Fox Field in Lancaster. This would add an hour or so of driving time to the 3.5 hour flight from Boise, still much preferable to the two-plus days of driving such a transfer would normally take.

"We can't thank LightHawk enough. These transfers of birds really make a difference in how we can manage the population moves in a more fluid way... The shorter the trip, the quicker the anxiety is over for the birds," said Mike Clark, Condor Keeper, Los Angeles Zoo.

The California condor, one of the original species included on the 1973 Endangered Species Act, is classified as critically endangered. In 1982, only 22 individuals remained in the wild, and by 1987, the last condors were brought into human care to save the species from extinction. Thanks to a cooperative recovery program led by the US Fish and Wildlife Service, the world's California condor population now totals close to 500 birds, most of which are flying free.

LightHawk is a rare beast in the conservation world, supporting environmental efforts through the skills and generosity of a corps of highly skilled volunteer pilots, managed by a staff team of conservation professionals. Since 1979, LightHawk has worked alongside conservation groups large and small throughout North America, from Alaska to Panama. Thousands of LightHawk flights have proven that the work of small planes can promote sustainable solutions to protect nature. We access areas that are hard to reach on the ground. We allow our partners to work more efficiently over a broader area, saving precious staff time and money. We provide "a-ha moments" for elected officials, scientists, donors, and environmental protection advocates, who have a chance to get that important bird's eye view of their work. Media flights provide an aerial story-telling platform for reporters, photographers and videographers.

Over the last five years, LightHawk has worked with many of the partners involved in California condor recovery. The World Center for Birds of Prey and the Los Angeles Zoo are two of the partners in the very successful captive breeding program, which often requires moving birds and even eggs from one facility to another for re-pairing to increase genetic diversity, or moving juveniles to field sites for release to the wild. LightHawk flights have made these transfers much smoother and safer for condors, reducing the likelihood of *capture myopathy*, a condition caused by excessive stress during transport. In just the last two years, LightHawk has transported six adult birds and one egg between breeding centers (including other recovery program partners like the Santa Barbara Zoo and the Oregon Zoo), and 13 juvenile condors for release to the wild flocks in California.

And with radio telemetry antennas mounted on airplanes, LightHawk flights also enable biologists from Pinnacles National Park and the Santa Barbara Zoo to locate missing wild birds when they go out of range of the hard-working field crews tracking from the ground. Keeping close tabs on these birds is important for their recovery, as sources of lead in the environ-



photo: Pinnacles National Park

Juvenile condors in release pen after successful transport.

ment still pose a threat. When scavenging birds, like condors, eat the remains of carcasses shot with lead ammunition, tiny fragments of the heavy metal can be ingested and then absorbed into their bloodstream, often causing long-term side effects and sometimes even death.

LightHawk's conservation team works closely with partners on a broad array of environmental issues throughout North America. In addition to other endangered species recovery programs such as Mexican wolves, we undertake aerial easement monitoring with land trusts, basin-wide river restoration and conservation work on rivers such as the Delaware and Colorado, and coastal documentation campaigns to educate elected officials about climate change associated sea-level rise.

Whether the passengers are scientists, donors, environmental protection advocates, or California condors, LightHawk's network of more than 300 volunteer pilots donate their expertise, time, aircraft, and fuel to support these projects, making flight support free of direct cost to LightHawk partners.

"What an absolute honor it is to help these majestic creatures progress toward a more sustainable future!" said volunteer pilot Wayne McClelland.

With pilots like Wayne at work, condors and their 9.5-foot wingspan may continue to soar the western skies for generations to come. ∞

(Christine Steele is LightHawk's Western Program Coordinator) [www.lighthawk.org](http://www.lighthawk.org)

## THREE California Wilderness bills: action in Congress

Three important California bills for wilderness and associated land preservation are now in Congress; all three were introduced, or re-introduced, in this Congress on April 10, 2019.

\*\* *HR 2199 and S 1111 the Central Coast Heritage Protection Act*, by Congressman Salud Carbajal (D-CA20) and Senator Kamala Harris. As of early December the bill had 33 House of Representatives cosponsors (all from California) and one in the Senate—Senator Feinstein. (WOW, Dec 2017.)

\*\* *HR 2215 and S 1109, the San Gabriel Mountains Foothills and Rivers Protection Act*, by Congresswoman Judy Chu (D-CA27) and Senator Harris. HR 2215 has 25 cosponsors and Sen. Feinstein on S 1109. (WOW, Aug 2019.)

\*\* *HR 2250 and S 1110, the Northwest California Wilderness, Recreation, and Working Forests Act*, by Congressman Jared Huffman (D-CA2) and Senator Harris, with 19 House cosponsors and Sen. Feinstein. (WOW, Aug & Dec 2018)

Now there is some progress for these bills. On November 20, all three bills were heard in the House of Representatives Natural Resources Committee and the first two were successfully passed out of committee. The committee did not manage to vote on Huffman's Northwest California bill.

A fourth California bill we support was also heard and finished its committee process--the Rim of the Valley Corridor Preservation Act (H 1708 and S 774), by Congressman Adam Schiff (D-CA28) and Senator Dianne Feinstein, with 17 House cosponsors and Sen. Harris. This bill expands the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area by 191,000 acres.

In preparation for the recent Committee action, Sierra Club sent an official letter to committee leadership (Chairman Raul Grijalva, D-AZ3, and ranking [minority] member Rob Bishop, R-UT1), giving Sierra Club positions and rationale for support. Extracts from the letter sent by the Sierra Club's DC Lands Team Director Athan Manuel follow:

*Central Coast Heritage Protection Act (H.R. 2199)*: 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. Two of its key landscapes are the Los Padres National Forest and Carrizo Plain, which boasts a large concentration of endangered wildlife and is culturally significant to more than a dozen tribes across central California. The Central Coast Heritage Protection Act would designate 244,909 acres of wilderness, establish two scenic areas totaling 34,882 acres, and protect 159 miles of wild and scenic rivers in the Los Padres National Forest and Carrizo Plain National Monument. The bill also designates the new Condor National Recreation Trail,

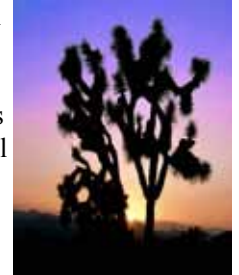
*San Gabriel Mountains Foothills and Rivers Protection Act (H.R. 2215)*: Located just an hour's drive outside of downtown Los Angeles, the San Gabriel Mountains area serves as a critical wildlife corridor for southern California and is home to iconic species such as the Nelson's bighorn sheep and the California condor. Its watershed provides a third of L.A.'s drinking water. In this park-poor region, San Gabriel Mountains is one of the few places Angelenos can enjoy the outdoors. As a result the area is under immense stress from overuse, vandalism, littering, and decreased water quality. San Gabriel Mountains Foothills and Rivers Protection Act would expand the boundaries of the San Gabriel Mountain National Monument by 109,403 acres to encompass the historic front range of the San Gabriel Mountains north of Pasadena and Altadena and establish a 51,107 acre National Recreation Area along the San Gabriel and Rio Hondo Rivers as well as the Puente-Chino Hills Wildlife Corridor south of the monument-- a marked step toward diversifying access to the San Gabriel Mountains.

*Northwest California Wilderness, Recreation, and Working Forests Act (H.R. 2250)*: This bill would protect the old-growth oak, conifer, and redwood forests of Northwest California--which also has the state's only undammed river, the Smith-- by designating more than 261,000 acres of Wilderness, 379 miles of wild and scenic rivers, and critical habitat designations for endangered salmon and steelhead. We have concerns regarding the wildfire

## Celebrating the Desert Act's 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in Death Valley

-- by Bruce Hale

On October 31, 1994 the California Desert Protection Act was signed into law by President Clinton. It upgraded Death Valley from monument status to national park status and added 1.3 million acres to the new park. Death Valley thus became the largest national park in the Lower 48 states. And national park status has played a crucial role in protecting Death Valley from being opened up wide to mining and Off-road vehicles by the Trump Administration.



Judy Anderson, longtime Sierra Club activist and charter member of the Angeles Chapter's Verdugo Hills Group, lobbied on behalf of the Sierra Club as a leading advocate for the CDPA. She was invited to Death Valley to participate in the park's week-long celebration marking the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the act this fall. She brought to the celebration her original blueprints for mapping the park boundaries in 1994 and donated them to the National Park Service which will carefully curate the documents. During her advocacy she

-- continued page 7, bottom

management language. The Sierra Club's long-time position is that fires are a natural, integral and valuable part of many ecosystems. House Report 98-40, allowing for establishment of fuel breaks and fire roads, plantation thinning, and "any" fire prevention tools that land managers have available, does not comport with Sierra Club policy. The Sierra Club suggests that any pre-suppression activities to protect communities occur within the Wildland Urban Interface. We do not consider it necessary to do extensive pre-suppression work within backcountry areas and particularly not in designated wilderness. ♪





# Outings

Support wilderness the Sierra Club way!



## January 25, 2020 - Sat Point Reyes Central Loop Hike

Join San Francisco Bay Chapter hiking section and Ventana Chapter Santa Cruz Group for this scenic day hike in America's first national seashore: Meet 8:30 am at Bear Valley trailhead



to start a leisurely to moderately paced scenic hike through varied terrain in this iconic National Park System area. Highlights include the top of Mt. Wittenberg, and Kelham Beach. Return to cars approximately 5:20 pm. For mellow hikers, not for speeders. Distance is about 13 miles, and elevation gain approximately 2000 feet (we climb Inverness Ridge twice). Contact Steve Bakaley, slbakaley@gmail.com.

## February 7 - Fri Service Project Event at ZZYZX

Join the Desert Committee service project the day before the Shoshone Wilderness and Desert meeting to help the National Park Service remove invasive non-native plants such as salt cedar (tamarisk sp.). Meet in parking lot for Desert Studies Center at Zzyzx at 8:30 am. Bring gloves, water, and lunch. Tools provided. For more info contact John Hiatt at (702)361-1171 or hjhiatt@gmail.com.

## February 15 - Sat Christmas Tree Pass cleanup (changed from S. McCullough Mtns.)

A Southern Nevada annual service day with Friends of Nevada Wilderness on the Saturday after our Shoshone meeting has become a tradition. Remembering the COLD last Feb. in the Desert National Wildlife Refuge, we head south of Las Vegas this winter to help BLM's

stewardship at the edge of the Nevada's southernmost Wilderness--Spirit Mountain. If you can stay around after the Feb 8-9 Shoshone meeting, join us on the 15th (and we might go out to Gold Butte midweek.) To sign up and for later details on the work project, contact Vicky Hoover, vicky.hoover@sierraclub.org, or (415)977-5527.

## March 27 - 29 -- Fri-Sun Spring Desert "Mystery" Service

Join CA/NV Wilderness Committee's annual spring service trip with BLM wilderness staff of Needles field office. Our mystery project--to be announced soon--will be in or near one of the many wilderness areas located within the Mojave Trails National Monument. Optional central commissary, usual exorbitant fee. Contact Vicky Hoover next year for more information or to sign up; see Feb 15.

## Desert Act's 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in Death Valley --from page 6

became familiar with many "pieces of Death Valley," often driving out to do visual inspections. Each page of the blueprints tells a story. Besides having had boots on the ground in many areas of Death Valley, she also flew back to Washington, DC to walk the halls of Congress. Park Superintendent Mike Reynolds said, "Judy Anderson was relentless in her pursuit of the CDPA". No wonder she attended the signing ceremony at the White House on October 31, 1994 and received the signing pen from President Clinton. Judy, dressed in red for the occasion, stands out next to the President in the official photograph. By the way, desert tortoises also accompanied the signing ceremony.

Death Valley National Park's celebration took place at the nicely appointed Visitor Center in Furnace Creek. Judy gave a presentation to the staff about the process of getting the bill through. It is not an exaggeration to describe the ultimate result of the eight-year process as a "miracle", especially because the bill passed on the very last day of the Congressional session. As part of the celebration, Judy had a panel discussion with Ranger Hilary Clark about the significance of the CDPA. One example of its ongoing benefit is that native species are coming back since ORV use is curtailed and grazing is no longer allowed in the park. The biggest public festivity came on Saturday on the patio of the Visitor Center and in its theater. National Park Service officials spoke. Judy received a plaque in honor of her work. Booths and displays gave information. Finally, park superintendents, past and present, spoke in a roundtable, sharing CDPA knowledge and observations of many years.

I drove up to Death Valley with Judy. Driving the wide-



Judy Anderson displays her CDPA blueprints at Death Valley's 25th anniversary celebration. Judy is flanked by NPS staffers Hilary Clark and Jane Lakeman, historian.

open spaces of Death Valley with their stark, silent beauty was exhilarating. Judy and I visited the Badwater Basin [lowest elevation in North America at -282 ft.] and the Ash Meadows Wildlife Refuge, best-known for the pup fish. The nights in Death Valley are utterly dark beyond the glow of the hotel. But ah, the glorious starry sky is positively awe-inspiring! Death Valley is famous for being the hottest (134 degrees F in 1913), for having the lowest spot (Badwater), for being the driest (the minimal rainfall does not even recoup moisture lost from evaporation), and it may also have the darkest nights. ~

(Bruce Hale is an officer of the Sierra Club Angeles Chapter's Verdugo Hills Group, on its Executive Committee)

## U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service proposes to list the West Coast Distinct Population of the Fisher as “Threatened”

-- from Central Sierra Environmental Resource Center (CSERC)

For years federal agency biologists have done surveys to search for the rare Pacific fisher. After years of debate over their status, a proposal by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) to list the

West Coast Distinct Population Segment of the Pacific fisher as “threatened” under the Endangered Species Act was released on November 7, 2019.

The fisher is a large, arboreal member of the weasel family that historically was widespread across much of Canada and the northeastern and western United States. It feeds on squirrels and a wide range of other prey. As described by the FWS listing proposal, stressors such as drought, habitat effects, vehicle mortality, predation, and

exposure to toxins (especially poisonous rodenticides at marijuana grow sites) have led to the species’ decline.

Sonora-based CSERC has partnered in the search for the rare fisher with more than two decades of photo-detection camera efforts. Only one fisher has been detected in all of those years in the Stanislaus National Forest, with more located in Yosemite Park and in national forests south of Yosemite.

If finalized, the ESA listing would be intended to protect fishers against harm or “take” – any action that can result in the death of a listed animal. For a variety of reasons, as part of the proposed listing, the FWS is proposing a special rule that would exempt certain forest management activities from the act’s “take” prohibitions. The exemptions would include activities such as the maintenance of existing fuel breaks, firefighting actions, and forest habitat management. CSERC sees a “habitat management” exemption as problematic, as it could allow aggressive logging

treatments such as clearcuts.

CSERC believes that the species should be listed. Fishers were abundant enough to be trapped extensively a century ago in the local forest but are now extremely rare.

A 30-day comment period on the FWS proposal closed on Dec. 9. ∞

(Extracted, with permission from ED and founder John Buckley, from an article in the fall 2019 CSERC newsletter)



photo: CSERC



photo: courtesy U.S. Forest Service

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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In every walk with nature one receives far more than one seeks.  
 -- John Muir