



WILDERNESS RECORD

Proceedings of the California Wilderness Coalition

October 1998

California's Vanishing Forests: Two Decades of Destruction Report paints a grim picture for state's potential wilderness

After a year of research and writing, CWC has completed *California's Vanishing Forests*. This report shows, for the first time since 1979, how much of California's national forest potential wilderness has been lost to logging and development, and how much remains at-risk. The results are shocking.

The report was a collaborative effort of countless CWC staff and volunteers. We think it will be a powerful tool in our effort to permanently protect California's last wild places. The Executive Summary, printed on page 6, details the major findings of the report, and makes recommendations for our remaining roadless areas. If you'd like more information, or a copy of the report, please don't hesitate to call us at (530) 758-0380.



A Report by the
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High Sierra wilderness plan falls short on commercial use, grazing



Banner and Ritter Peaks in the Ansel Adams Wilderness. The draft management plan for the Ansel Adams, John Muir, Monarch and Dinky Lakes wilderness areas fails to address many issues raised by conservationists. Meanwhile, an intense misinformation campaign from special interest groups is underway. Photo by Tim Palmer.

By Tom Suk

The U.S. Forest Service's draft plan for managing the John Muir, Ansel Adams, Monarch, and Dinky Lakes wilderness areas has been released and is awaiting comments from the public. When finalized, the combined plan for all four areas will guide the management of nearly one million acres of wilderness in the heart of John Muir's "Range of Light" for decades to come. All wilderness advocates are encouraged to voice their opinions at this time.

Once adopted, the wilderness management plan will prescribe the numbers of hikers, horseback riders, and commercial outfits that may use these areas. The plan is also required by law to include all restrictions on grazing, trail-building, campfires, and other activities that are necessary to protect these areas from over-use. However, the draft fails to address many issues raised by conservationists, and special-interest groups have mounted an intensive misinformation campaign and have flooded the agency with letters opposing the few positive aspects of the draft plan. For example, the draft plan designates remote, pristine areas as off-limits to new trail construction. In response, the "Blue Ribbon Coalition" (BRC), a consortium of off-highway vehicle, jet-ski, snowmobile, and similar groups, is whipping the public and local politicians into a frenzy by falsely claiming that under the draft plan "several hundred miles of trails will be obliterated in this pristine zone." The simple truth is that only a very few miles of trails are scheduled for closure under the current draft plan (i.e., where parallel trails already exist and duplicate trails are not needed), and the draft plan actually allows for new trail construction in many areas. Another graphic example of the lies being spread by the BRC and other special interests is their claim that

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...to promote throughout the State of California the preservation of wild lands as legally designated wilderness areas by carrying on an educational program concerning the value of wilderness and how it may best be used and preserved in the public interest, by making and encouraging scientific studies concerning wilderness, and by enlisting public interest and cooperation in protecting existing or potential wilderness areas.

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Coalition News

Director's Report

By the time you read this, CWC will have released *California's Vanishing Forests*, a report which documents, for the first time since 1979, the devastating losses of California's national forest potential wilderness areas. The losses, you will read, are staggering.

The report shows that California has lost over 675,000 acres of wild forest in the past two decades—an area almost the size of Yosemite National Park. This amounts to ninety-seven acres of wild forest land destroyed every day since 1979.

Also, by the time you read this, President Clinton's Administration—if it still exists—will have announced a policy prohibiting road construction in certain roadless areas. The long awaited policy was proposed in January, but never finalized. It follows from President Clinton's promise last November to develop a roadless area policy that is "based on science, not politics."

Despite the President's promise, the roadless area policy is most certainly based on politics. The policy prevents road construction, but not logging, off-road vehicle use, mining, or other forms of development. These activities, more than road construction, are the primary threats to roadless areas, and any policy that is truly based on science should not ignore the reams of scientific literature which point to the damage that logging, off-road vehicle use, and development have had on our wild places.

Even more egregious is the fact that the proposed policy excludes the entire Tongass National Forest in Alaska, and every national forest in the Pacific northwest, among others. In California alone, the exempted forests contain over one-and-a-quarter million acres of roadless land.

The Administration justified excluding the northwest forests by arguing that the Northwest Forest Plan provides adequate protection for northwest roadless areas—despite the fact that the plan pays no special attention to roadless areas, offers those areas little protection, and leaves many of them completely vulnerable to logging

and development. In truth, the Administration excluded the northwest forests to appease politicians from Oregon and Washington who feared a backlash of any election-year policy that appeared to curtail logging in the region.

With the release of *California's Vanishing Forests*, we are now well-equipped with information regarding the rarity, importance, and vulnerability of California's last national forest roadless areas. We now know that California has lost 675,000 acres of national forest roadless areas

in the last two decades. We also know that only 3.8 million acres of agency-certified roadless areas remain in our national forests. (There also may exist several hundred thousand acres of roadless land that was missed by the last government survey.)

By contrast, over sixteen million acres of national forest land in California has been logged, roaded, mined, degraded and developed to the point that it no longer meets the Congressional definition of wilderness. Some of this land can be reclaimed as it heals from the wounds imposed by civilization. Other areas have been lost forever.

With only 3.8 million acres of roadless land remaining in all of our national forests, it is simply imperative that we protect every last acre. And a policy that leaves vulnerable over a third of that land is indefensible.

Conservationists, including CWC, have campaigned for decades to protect our remaining roadless lands. Many areas have already been protected by past Congressional action. Unfortunately, the current Congress is dominated by anti-environmental zealots, and in two years we may face a Republican Administration as well. If that happens, wilderness legislation may be a long time coming.

Thus the Clinton Administration's roadless area policy becomes even more important. It has become the last line of defense for hundreds of imperiled roadless areas, and has presented us the opportunity of a lifetime: the opportunity to achieve unilateral protection for all remaining potential wilderness areas in our national forests. We desperately need to seize this opportunity.

By Paul Spitler

CWC's annual fundraiser, held in San Francisco on October first, was a smashing success. Over a hundred Coalition supporters celebrated a great year at CWC, while enjoying food and wine donated by several Bay Area wineries and restaurants. Renowned climber Rick Ridgeway gave an inspirational slide show, and a good time was had by all. The event raised over \$15,000—the most ever for a CWC fundraising event—to support the Coalition's conservation programs. Thanks to all who attended or contributed!

CWC's Rich Hunter recently presented a poster of the Coalition's Ventana Wildlands Project at the Wildlands Grassroots Rendezvous in Estes Park, Colorado. The poster showed critical mountain lion habitat and potential wildlife reserves in the central coast region of California. With the help of the Ventana Wildlands Group, we will refine the information in the poster to show a complete system of wildlife reserves throughout the central coast region. This proposed reserve system will serve as the basis for a long-term campaign to protect the region's critical wildlife habitat.

CWC welcomed three new interns this month, Gregory Love, Andrew Grant, and Joy Johnson. All three are students at U.C. Davis with a strong interest in conservation. Gregory and Andrew will assist in several CWC campaigns, including our Adopt-a-Wilderness, Wildlands 2000 and wildlands defense. Joy will be working with Rich on the California Wildlands Project. They join returning intern Sulakshna Singh to form an awesome crew of conservation interns. Welcome aboard and welcome back!

Nate Greenberg, wilderness mapper extraordinaire, has completed mapping potential wilderness areas in the Klamath National Forest and has returned to school at U.C. Davis. Nate spent three months mapping in the Klamath, fighting off snow banks, toppled trees, and an engine that failed at the worst possible times. After his brief, nine month hiatus at school, we hope to send Nate to the Modoc National Forest to map the potential wilderness of this critical region. Anyone care to join him?

Endangered Species

When exceptions become the rule: ESA exemptions jeopardize forest species, ecosystems

By Daniel Hall

Roughly one third of California's forests are owned by private, state, and other non-federal landowners, including a disproportionately high amount of the coastal, mid- and lower-elevation forests. Conserving and restoring habitats on these lands is often essential to the survival and recovery of imperiled salmon, birds, and other flora and fauna. This is one of the basic reasons that The Wildlands Project supports conservation easements and restoration incentives for resource lands managed by private parties.

Therefore, shouldn't we be pleased that over 3,400,000 acres of forestlands owned by the wood products industry and other landowners in California will soon be covered by Habitat Conservation Plans (HCPs)?

No. HCPs actually give corporate landowners long-term exemptions from protecting and restoring habitats for imperiled fish, wildlife, and plants. In the blink of an eye, the Clinton Administration is condemning substantial amounts of endangered species and their habitats, excusing landowners from protecting species which might become listed in the future, and guaranteeing that any habitat restoration will have to be subsidized by you, the taxpayer. The MAXXAM Corporation's HCP for the Headwaters forest is only the tip of the iceberg.

HCPs are required by the Federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) to minimize and mitigate the destruction and degradation of imperiled species and their habitats when landowners and developers are given exemptions from the ESA's basic protection measures for these species. These exemptions are known formally as "Incidental Take Permits."

Arguably, these exemptions were intended as a "safety valve" for limited and extremely intractable situations. Now, thanks to Secretary of Interior Babbitt and others, entire landscapes are being exempted from the ESA. Nearly 80 percent (3,400,859 acres) of the industry and state-owned forestlands in California will be covered by HCPs in development.

Ironically, these plans are providing ESA exemptions to many of the same industry landowners that drove species to the brink of extinction by clear-cutting old-growth and other natural forest stands, and by using short-rotations, monocultures, and other practices that limit habitat re-establishment.

One plan being developed by Sierra Pacific Industries (SPI) will affect as much as 1,400,000 acres of forest in California's Sierra Nevada and northern interior region. SPI is reportedly requesting a 50-year exemption from protecting and recovering northern spotted owl, coho salmon, steelhead, marbled murrelet, red legged frog, and as many as 200 unlisted "species of concern" including California spotted owl. Another 7,901,462 acres are being covered by forest exemption plans in other western states. HCPs affecting riparian forests and other ecosystems are also rapidly being developed in the Central Valley and southern California.

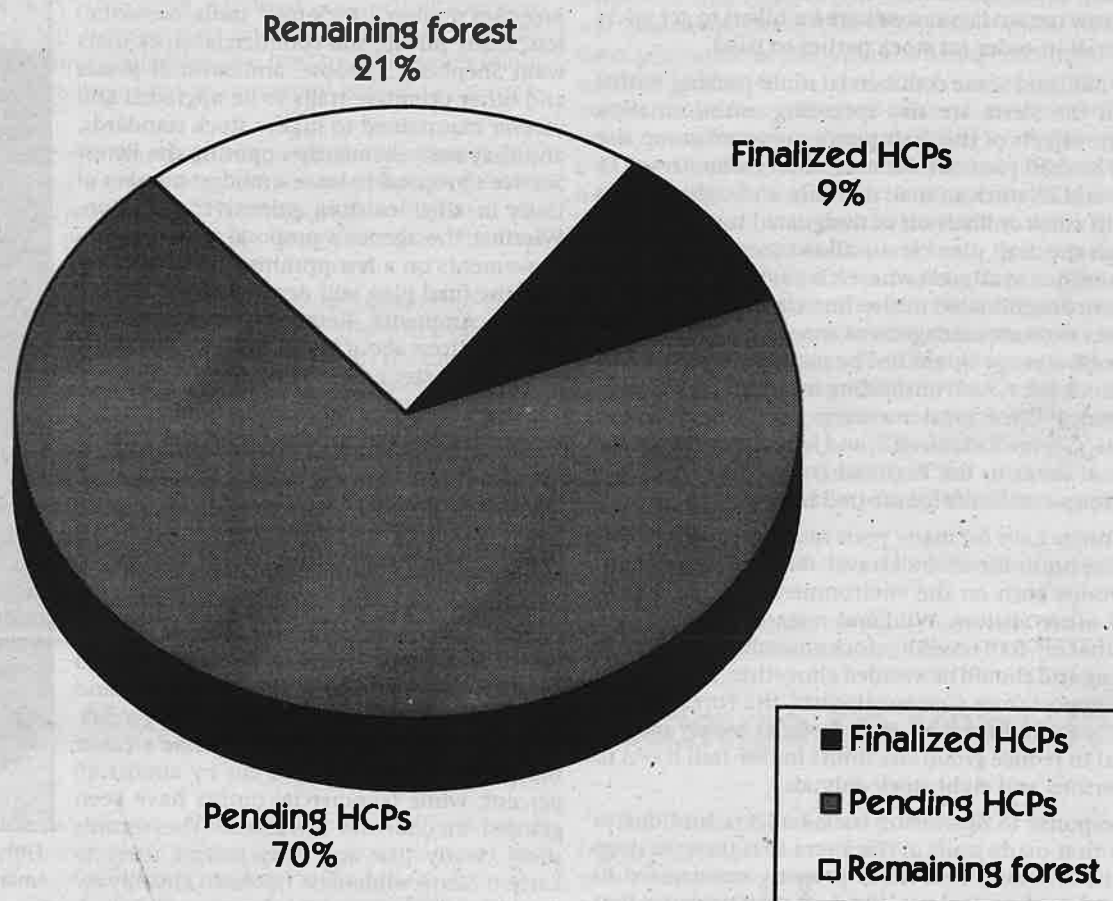
Industry HCPs typically allow the logging of remaining old-growth reserve areas and other habitat for imperiled species like northern spotted owl, widespread clearcutting on frequent cycles, spraying of hardwoods and other "undesirable" vegetation, and continued degradation of habitat for various

Ironically, these plans are providing ESA exemptions to many of the same industry landowners that drove species to the brink of extinction

flora and fauna. In return, these plans usually provide only slightly wider buffer strips along those streams that still bear fish, reduce road erosion, retain a few trees in each acre clearcut, and so on. These measures fall far short of what most species need for their recovery and fail to replace the habitats being logged under these plans. Secretary Babbitt's "no surprises" policy then lets the landowners off the hook if the plans fail to even meet their watered-down goals, or if more species become threatened or endangered.

The protection and recovery of imperiled species will require both more effective enforcement of the ESA's basic habitat protections, as well as new incentives for landowners to restore habitat. HCPs and "no surprises" are taking us in the opposite direction on both counts.

Industry & State Forests Affected by Species Exemption Plans in California



Finalized HCPs:	383,000 acres (9%)
Pending HCPs:	3,017,859 acres (70%)
Remaining Timberland:	915,141 acres (21%)

Source: HCP Inventory, Forest Biodiversity Program, American Lands Alliance.

Notes: The remaining industry and state forests, as well as other forest areas, may also be subject to HCPs in coming years.

So what can we do? Plenty. Call or write the White House, your Senators, and your Congressperson, and ask them to throw out "no surprises" and either stop promoting HCPs or write rules to turn these habitat destruction plans into true conservation plans that protect species, use alternative forestry, and restore habitats. There are also important opportunities to shape pending HCPs. SPI's plan, for example, is still in the early stages of development. To learn more, contact Daniel Hall at (503) 978-0511 or by e-mail at wafcbp@teleport.com, or contact Brian Vincent, at American Lands Alliance, California office, at (530) 265-3506.

Fish, wildlife, plants, and biodiversity are our natural heritage and belong to everyone — it's time we put a stop to HCPs, corporate giveaways, and the destruction of endangered species' habitats. It's time everyone did their share to promote habitat restoration, ecosystem recovery, healthy forests, and thriving populations of salmon and other fish and wildlife across our landscapes.

Daniel Hall is with the Forest Biodiversity Program of the American Lands Alliance.

Wilderness Planning

High Sierra wilderness planning

Continued from page 1

the Mt. Whitney trail would be closed to stock animals by this plan (*BlueRibbon Magazine*, 8/98), when in fact the Mt. Whitney trail has been closed to stock animals for more than 20 years. (Stock animals have been prohibited on the Whitney trail since the 1970s because of the popularity of the trail and due to the fact that the steep and narrow terrain leaves nowhere for hikers to get safely off the trail in order for stock parties to pass).

The BRC and some commercial mule-packing outfits based in the Sierra are also spreading misinformation about the effects of the draft plan's proposed group size limits. The draft plan calls for maximum group sizes of 15 persons and 25 stock animals on trails, and eight persons and eight stock animals off of designated trail corridors. Although the draft plan clearly allows recreational stock use to continue in all areas where it is allowed today, stock users have disseminated misleading claims that the plan "proposes to create management zones where 85 percent of the total acreage would not be managed for pack and saddle stock use." Such misleading information was used to convince three local members of Congress (John Doolittle, George Radanovich, and Jerry Lewis) to sign an emotional letter to the Regional Forester opposing the lower group size limits for off-trail travel.

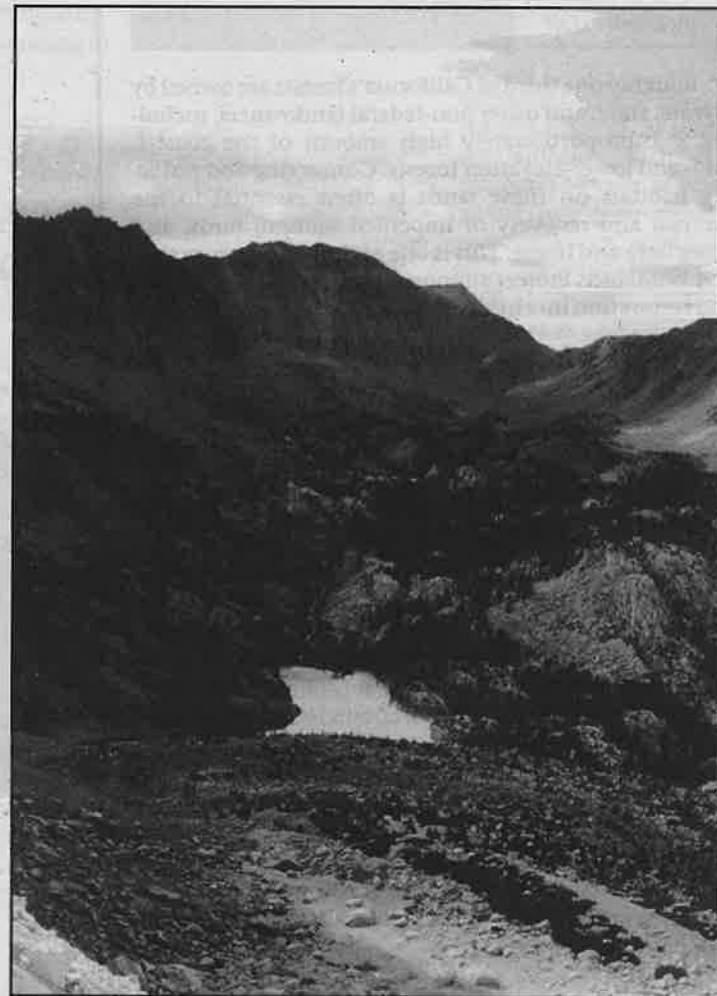
Scientists have for many years recommended smaller group size limits for off-trail travel, due to the impacts of large groups both on the environment and the experience of other visitors. Wildland researchers have concluded that off-trail travel by stock animals is particularly damaging and should be avoided altogether. But without strong support from conservationists, the Forest Service may be forced to back off even from its overly modest proposal to reduce group size limits for off-trail travel to eight persons and eight stock animals.

In response to decreasing trails budgets, and due to the fact that many trails in the Sierra that traverse steep or sensitive terrain were never properly constructed to withstand stock animal use, the draft plan proposes that several primitive trails will not be upgraded or maintained for stock travel. Specifically, the draft plan proposes that several steep east-side passes (such as Shepherd, Sawmill, and Taboose) will not be improved to facilitate travel with stock animals. However, stock users would still be allowed to use the existing rough routes if they so desire.

During the initial public comment period, many hikers requested that the agency create a modest network of "foot-travel-only" trails so that they could enjoy an experience free of the dust, manure, and flies that often result along trails used by stock animals. But the draft plan proposes no new "stock-free" trails. Nevertheless, many private and commercial stock users want Shepherd, Taboose, and Sawmill passes and other primitive trails to be upgraded and forever maintained to higher stock standards, and they are vehemently opposing the Forest Service's proposal to leave a modest number of trails in their existing primitive condition. Whether the agency's proposal to forego improvements on a few primitive trails makes it into the final plan will depend largely on the public comments. Respondents should give their opinions about Shepherd, Taboose, Sawmill, and Baxter passes by name.

Another concern to conservationists is that individuals have long been limited by a quota system that restricts daily entry at many trailheads, but commercial outfits (such as horse and mulepacking businesses and commercial mountain guides) are not subject to the quota system, and the commercial outfits are in fact allowed to write their own wilderness permits. Gary Guenther of Wilderness Watch, a non-profit wilderness advocacy group, has pored through piles of government documents and discovered that, within the last twenty years, access by private backpackers to some areas of the eastern Sierra has been cut by almost 40 percent, while commercial outfits have been granted incremental increases. "The records show clearly that access by private users to Eastern Sierra wilderness has been steadily reduced, while the number of commercial stock animals in use is at an all-time high," said Guenther. Many who recreate in the High Sierra are questioning the fairness of such an arrangement, especially since the Forest Service continues to reduce hiker quotas with one hand, and with the other hand grant increases to commercial pack stock outfits—often without asking for public input or preparing environmental assessments.

Perhaps the biggest disappointment with the draft plan is that it contains no meaningful limits on commercial use of these areas. While the draft plan would prohibit any additional commercial outfits from using these areas, it would allow the existing commercial outfits to expand, with no concrete limits on their growth. The Forest Service had promised conservationists that limits on existing commercial uses would be included in this plan, but the agency appears to have reneged on that commitment, and has included in the draft only vague language that says a "needs assessment" for commercial uses will be conducted at some future unspecified date. A "needs assessment" is required for these areas (and should have been conducted years ago) because the Wilderness Act of 1964 generally prohibits commercial uses of wilderness areas unless the managing agency makes a finding that a specific commercial use is "necessary" to achieve one or more goals of the Act. For example, commercial outfitter and guide services are often deemed necessary to facilitate safe wilderness travel by persons with disabilities, or beginners who do not have sufficient experience to travel alone. Conservationists recognize these legitimate commercial uses, and are asking simply that a needs assessment be conducted before the draft



Fifth Lake, Palisades Basin, John Muir Wilderness. Photographer unknown.



Wilderness Lands of the High Sierra
The dark areas indicate the wilderness areas to be affected by the draft Forest Service plan.

plan is approved, and that clear limits on all existing commercial uses be specified in the final plan.

Grazing by recreational stock animals (i.e., horses, mules, burros, etc.) is also a key issue in these four wilderness areas. The impacts of stock grazing and trampling on sensitive alpine meadows, wetlands, and lakeshores was one of the key issues raised by the public at the outset of the planning process in 1992. However, although the Forest Service took more than five years to prepare this draft plan, the agency conducted no systematic evaluation of the condition of backcountry areas. "It appears that the agency people wrote this plan at their desks without ever going outside," said Peter Browning of the High Sierra Hikers Association. "It is hard to believe that the Forest Service needed more than five years to prepare a draft plan that contains almost no specific information about on-the-ground resource conditions."

Most conservationists agree that the agency should assess resource conditions and prohibit grazing in sensitive, high-elevation areas where soils remain perpetually wet. Such "wetland" areas are supposed to be protected under federal and state regulations, but are often forgotten in remote wilderness settings. The numerous deep hoofprints frequently caused by stock grazing in alpine wetland areas can result in accelerated erosion and loss of wetland soils that took thousands of years to form.

Another practice that has worked well in other national forests and parks, but which is absent from the draft plan, is "opening dates" for grazing. The concept is

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Wildlands News



By Rich Hunter

Margaret Mead has said, "Never doubt that a small group of people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." Such optimism emanated throughout the first continental grassroots rendezvous of The Wildlands Project (TWP) in early October.

Over two hundred activists and scientists from around North America gathered in Estes Park, Colorado over three days for workshops, poster presentations, and conservation biology seminars geared toward the conference theme of "Science and the Conservation of Nature." The choice of speakers truly reflected how the project bridges the gap between wilderness activism and conservation biology. Keynote presentations were delivered by Michael Soule and Dave Foreman of TWP, Reed Noss of Conservation Biology Institute, and Jim Estes of the U.S. Geological Survey.

Soule opened the conference by defining "rewilding," the project's focus on restoring wilderness and large intact habitat areas. He placed the strategy in the context of other approaches to conserve biodiversity. He asserted

The Wildlands Project Grassroots Rendezvous: North American wildlands activists convene to share strategies for rewilding nature

that rewilding is a responsibility of conservationists who work for the health and integrity of the land.

Foreman, one of the people most responsible for spawning TWP in 1992, delivered a compelling overview of how our strategy aims to "heal the wounds" of the land. Restoring wilderness for the large carnivores of our native ecosystems is a monumental task of our generation.

Reed Noss, Jim Strittholt, and Carlos Carroll presented their methodology for reserve design in the Klamath-Siskiyou region. This project has contributed significantly to TWP by setting the standard for rigorous analysis in the process of reserve design.

Drawing from his research on the importance of sea otters in kelp forest communities, Jim Estes provided some examples of empirical evidence for the importance of large carnivores in maintaining ecosystem health.

California Wilderness Coalition created a poster for the Ventana Wildlands Project, an alliance of groups designing a reserve network for the Central Coast region. The poster presented preliminary research on potential core areas and linkages for mountain lions. CWC was one of twenty-five groups which presented posters at the conference. Other poster topics included the Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative, habitat modelling for

grizzly bear in Colorado and New Mexico, and the citizen's reinventory of wildlands in the red-rock country of Utah.

The breadth and scientific quality of presentations reinforced that there is objective evidence for the ideas and goals underlying The Wildlands Project. Applying these principles on the ground will depend upon further research specific to the context of the problem and the integration of new ecological concepts as they are understood, as well as grassroots organizing and implementation strategy. The conference revealed some of our weaknesses as well. Restoration science and political support are key components to realizing our vision on the ground, but these areas lag furthest behind. Soule and Noss address these concerns in a recent paper published in *Wild Earth*. While some may describe TWP as a romantic obsession with the resurrection of Eden, they contend that "rewilding is simply scientific realism, assuming that our goal is the long-term integrity of the land community. In a project as complex as saving living nature, a diversity of approaches will be needed." By sharing a diversity of ideas and research at the conference, we all gained energy and courage to forge ahead in our visionary campaign.

Rich Hunter is the California Wildlands Project Coordinator.

BLM to close Black Sands Beach in the King Range to vehicles

By Ryan Henson

One of the most controversial and difficult decisions ever proposed by the staff of the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) Arcata Field Office is now one step closer to being implemented. On October 1, the Arcata Field Office announced that it has decided to close Black Sands Beach in the King Range National Conservation Area (NCA) to off-road vehicles.

Located in southwestern Humboldt County, the King Range NCA (part of California's "Lost Coast") is one of the BLM's most popular holdings. The area has been featured many times in major newspapers and national magazines, and use of the area by hikers and backpackers has increased tremendously. For example, the BLM estimates that in 1996 the Lost Coast Trail in the western portion of the King Range received 14,000 "recreation visitor days." Each day a person spends on the trail is counted as one recreation visitor day.

The area's popularity is mostly due to the spectacular blend of beach, surf, marsh, ancient forest, grassland, chaparral, and streamside habitats one can enjoy in the King Range. This diversity of ecosystems in turn hosts a great variety of plants and wildlife.

The vast majority of the NCA is closed to motor vehicles. In fact, over the last few years the BLM has even closed and restored a few old roads to a more natural condition by planting native plants and scarifying the roadbed. This, coupled with the fact that the BLM has long supported wilderness designation for much of the NCA (conservationists have proposed far more) made the continued use of motorized vehicles on Black Sands Beach a sad anomaly.

The BLM first proposed to close the beach to off-road vehicles in October 1997. In the twelve months since, the

BLM has weathered a blistering storm of criticism from vehicle enthusiasts. BLM staff have been harassed and called everything from "bigots" to "jack-booted thugs." Some BLM staff even grew concerned for their personal safety.

In addition to this informal pressure, off-road vehicle enthusiasts sent 650 comments opposing the closure, and two members of Congress joined them. Those against the closure dominated a public hearing in Redway, California where BLM staff were verbally abused throughout the meeting.

To counteract this sustained assault against the BLM, the CWC, EPIC, Northcoast Environmental Center, and the Sierra Club generated 859 pro-closure comments from the public. Since the BLM, Forest Service, and other agencies consider personal letters (as opposed to petitions and form-letters) the most powerful form of communication, it is significant that conservationists sent 253 personal letters to the BLM as opposed to the 70 sent by anti-closure forces. In addition, the CWC won the support of eight members of Congress for the closure. Unofficially, conservationists also helped BLM staff "keep their chins up" during the ordeal.

Over the past few weeks the BLM cleared the last hurdles necessary before rendering a final decision. First, the California Coastal Commission had to review the proposed closure to determine if it is consistent with the California Coastal Act. Off-road vehicle enthusiasts argued that the closure violated the act since it would reduce public access to the beach. At a meeting in Eureka dominated by conservationists, the board voted 10-1 to support the BLM's proposed closure. Governor Wilson's appointees joined Coastal Commission Democrats in voicing support for the BLM.

The last hurdle was more difficult. A few years ago Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt decided to create advisory bodies composed of members of the public and various established interest groups. These resource advisory councils (RACs) were instrumental in developing BLM grazing reform policies and generating public support for them. Normally, such wide-ranging and (hopefully) meaningful reforms would have been held up in federal court for years.

The Northwest California RAC encouraged the BLM to leave Black Sands Beach open to vehicles for a trial period during which time the off-road vehicle enthusiasts would have to prove that they would speed, litter, shoot, and harass hikers less than in the past. If they could demonstrate courtesy, then they would be allowed to continue riding on the beach indefinitely. The RAC passed this recommendation over the strenuous objection of its conservationist members (a CWC staff member serves on the Northwest California RAC). After this tremendously contentious meeting, the BLM discovered that the rules of order for the RACs specify that a consensus is necessary to forward major recommendations to the BLM, not a mere majority vote. Thus, the RACs proposed compromise was invalid. This is fortunate since the Arcata BLM has always followed RAC recommendations in the past, and may have been bound to follow the Black Sands "compromise" if the majority vote had been valid.

Despite the BLM's official closure announcement, off-road vehicle enthusiasts may still file an appeal against the agency and sue in federal court. Given the BLM's firm legal ground and extensive public support, it is unlikely that the agency's decision will be reversed.

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National Forest Roadless Areas

Executive Summary

California's Vanishing Forests: Two Decades of Destruction

By 1979, California's national forests contained only two million acres of protected wilderness. Meanwhile, over sixteen million acres—or two-thirds of our national forests—had been logged, developed, laced with roads, or otherwise degraded to the point they could no longer qualify as wilderness as defined by the 1964 Wilderness Act.

In 1979, the United States Forest Service inventoried California's twenty-four million acres of national forest lands to identify potential wilderness areas. The survey found that only 6.3 million acres of roadless land remained in California's national forests. These lands represent our last wild places.

In the past two decades, we've lost an additional 675,449 acres of national forest roadless land, an amount almost equal to the size of Yosemite National Park. Since 1979, we've lost ninety-seven acres of wild forest land every day.

There is overwhelming scientific evidence that roadless areas play an important role in conserving biological diversity; they provide important wildlife habitat and

pure drinking water for millions of Californians. In addition, these areas serve as a refuge for Americans seeking to escape, if just briefly, from our increasingly industrialized society.

The table printed below summarizes roadless area losses by region since 1979.

Analysis

Losses of roadless land are not spread evenly throughout the state.

Northwestern California lost 248,921 acres—far more than any other region. The Modoc National Forest lost fifty-three percent of its roadless land—a far greater percentage than any other national forest. The Los Padres National Forest lost 130,067 roadless acres—more acres than any other national forest. The Shasta-Trinity National Forest lost 121,389 acres.

Logging, road construction, and off-road vehicle use, have had the greatest impacts on California's roadless

lands since 1979. While logging destroyed almost all of the roadless areas in the northwest and northern Sierra, off-road vehicle use severely impacted specific regions, particularly southern California and the eastern Sierra Nevada. Mining, power line construction, electronic sites, aqueducts and recreational developments also caused impacts.

Since the 1979 government survey of national forest roadless areas, many have been partially destroyed by logging, road construction, and other development. In some cases, the wilderness character of an entire area was destroyed. In fact, thirty-six areas that were entirely roadless and pristine in 1979 had their wild character stripped away in the past nineteen years. Today, they must be counted among the more than sixteen million acres of national forest in California that have been logged, roaded, mined, and developed to the point that they are no longer qualify for wilderness. The following thirty-six areas are casualties of the Forest Service's misguided management policies—their names are all that remain:

Dexter Canyon, Watterson, Box Camp, Boulder, Muse, Black, Cub, Indian Creek, De La Guerra, Black Mountain, La Panza, Los Machos, Big Rocks, Stanley Mountain, Miranda Pine, Horseshoe Spring, Tepusquet Peak, La Brea, Reister Canyon, Knox Mountain, Sears Flat, Damon Butte, Hat Mountain, Hixon Flat, Lyon Ridge, Dog Creek, Eagle, East Girard, Kettle Mountain, Penney Ridge, Slate Creek, Salt Gulch, Wells Mountain, Pilot Creek, Bald Mountain, and Dome.

In January, 1998, the Clinton Administration proposed to halt road construction in certain roadless areas throughout the United States. The policy specifically excludes the national forests of the Pacific northwest including California's Klamath, Six Rivers, Shasta-Trinity, Mendocino, and portions of the Siskiyou and Rogue River national forests. This report documents that one-and-a-quarter million acres of the most vulnerable roadless land in the state were exempted from the ban on road construction.

Conclusion

• In the past two decades, California has lost 675,449 acres of roadless land—ninety-seven acres per day—an amount almost equal to the size of Yosemite National Park. Logging, road construction, and off-road vehicle use destroyed most of these lands. Today, only 3.8 million acres of Forest Service-surveyed potential wilderness remain in California.

Recommendation:

All of California's remaining roadless forest lands should be immediately protected and set off-limits to logging, road construction, mining, off-road vehicle use, and other development.

• Over one-and-a-quarter million acres of the most vulnerable roadless areas in California are exempt from the Clinton Administration's proposed ban on road construction. Northwest California, which lost 248,921 roadless acres—far more acres than any other region in the state—is exempt from the road building ban.

Recommendation:

The Clinton Administration's proposed ban on road construction in roadless areas should include full protection for all roadless areas, including those in northwest California.

REGION/NATIONAL FOREST	ROADLESS ACRES IN 1979	ROADLESS ACRES LOST SINCE 1979
Northwest		
Klamath	433,700	69,005
Mendocino	213,400	32,416
Shasta-Trinity	549,800	121,389
Rogue River	34,535	0
Siskiyou	8,294	0
Six Rivers	249,100	26,111
Subtotal	1,488,829	248,921
Sierra North		
Modoc	138,770	73,013
Plumas	84,650	9,537
Lassen	220,400	13,053
Subtotal	443,820	95,603
Sierra Central		
Eldorado	103,300	6,492
Humboldt-Toiyabe	358,850	7,062
Lake Tahoe Basin MU	39,700	758
Stanislaus	241,800	15,539
Tahoe	165,500	40,606
Subtotal	909,150	70,457
Sierra South		
Sequoia	571,369	34,592
Sierra	366,380	12,624
Inyo	993,680	50,617
Subtotal	1,931,429	97,833
Southern		
Angeles	192,500	9,818
Cleveland	44,600	750
Los Padres	1,085,400	130,067
San Bernardino	273,735	22,000
Subtotal	1,596,235	162,635
Total	6,369,463	675,449

Wilderness News

High Sierra wilderness planning

Continued from page 4

simple: Alpine meadows in the Sierra are saturated and susceptible to trampling damage early in the season following snowmelt. As the meadows become drier, they can better withstand trampling and grazing impacts. Opening dates are set by the agencies so that grazing may not commence until the meadows are sufficiently dry to protect against deep hoofprints and other trampling damage, such as streambank "chiseling." Although conservationists asked the Forest Service to include specific opening dates in the plan, the agency says that the need for opening dates will instead be evaluated at some future unspecified date, in the "annual operating plans" prepared for each commercial pack outfit. This approach is unacceptable because there is no guarantee that the existing impacts will ever be addressed, since the preparation and approval of operating plans for commercial outfits are negotiated "behind closed doors" without public involvement or environmental documentation, and because opening dates should be set for all stock users, both commercial and private.

Another very controversial element of the draft plan is its scheme for regulating campfires. It has long been known that high-elevation subalpine forests—such as whitebark pine, foxtail pine, limber pine, etc.—do not produce sufficient "ground fuels" (i.e., twigs, branches, etc.) to sustain firewood collection while leaving enough organic material on the ground surface for ecosystem protection. Woody material on the forest floor is needed for a host of reasons, including soil formation, water holding capacity, soil temperature moderation, protection of the soil surface from erosion, and many other ecosystem functions that are critical to plants and animals at high elevations. In recognition of this, many national forests and parks prohibit campfires at high elevations, and conservationists have long supported such regulations because elevational fire restrictions provide protection for subalpine ecosystems in a way that is easy for wilderness travelers to understand.

The only opposition to elevational fire limits in the John Muir, Ansel Adams, Monarch, and Dinkey Lakes wildernesses appears to come from a vocal minority of private and commercial users who want to continue to have fires in sensitive subalpine areas even though the adverse impacts are well known. The Forest Service proposal bows to those interests by allowing unlimited campfires in almost all high-elevation areas, until such time that monitoring shows that the ground has been stripped of protective organic cover and standing trees have been cut by campers seeking wood for their campfires. Only then would the agency regulate fires, and only the most heavily impacted areas would be closed. One key problem with this approach is that the agency has little or no funds for monitoring campfire impacts. Even worse, such an approach allows significant and easily avoidable damage to occur before the agency takes corrective action. Curiously, the draft plan even says that managers will "adjust quotas" (i.e., reduce visitor access) before the agency considers elevational campfire closures. This means that the Forest Service will tell you to stay out of certain areas before they will regulate the behavior that is causing the problem. The most common-sense approach, which has been used successfully in

many other areas, is to establish elevations above which campfires are not allowed, and criteria for adopting site-specific fire closures below those elevations as needed. Such an approach would prevent predictable impacts in a way that is very easy for the public to understand, and simple for the agencies to enforce.

The use of airspace over wilderness by military jets is another issue of concern to many who visit these areas. The ongoing expansion of military training flights over the Sierra is making it increasingly difficult to have a peaceful "wilderness experience." The military often argues that it cannot moderate its flights over wilderness areas unless the applicable wilderness plan identifies a quantitative threshold for noise. It is therefore crucial that the Forest Service hear from the public that the natural quiet is an important reason why so many of us visit wilderness, and that the draft plan needs to be supplemented to include quantitative standards to fully protect the natural quiet from the intrusion of military and other aircraft. If noise standards are not incorporated into the draft plan, military training routes over these areas will be allowed to increase with virtually no limits.

Unless the Forest Service hears a loud and clear message from wilderness advocates, vocal commercial outfits and selfish short-sighted users will prevail. Unless conservationists put pen to paper at this time, the High Sierra wilderness will be further degraded, and the discrimination against private parties in favor of commercial interests will continue. Now is the time to make your opinions known!



What you can do

Send a letter to the Forest Service by November 2, 1998 (postmark deadline). State that you are commenting on the "Draft Environmental Impact Statement: Management Direction for the Ansel Adams, John Muir, Dinkey Lakes, and Monarch Wildernesses." Use the article above to inform your opinions, and consider raising the following points:

consider raising the following points:

(1) Ask that the draft plan be supplemented to incorporate numeric limits on all commercial uses, and to prohibit any further increases (permanent or "temporary") in "service days" for any commercial outfit(s) until a formal "Needs Assessment" has been completed with full public involvement;

(2) Ask that all commercial outfits be required to go through the same reservation and permit system as the general public, i.e., the unfair practice of allowing commercial outfits to write their own wilderness permits should be discontinued;

(3) Ask that the draft plan be supplemented to: (a) specifically identify sensitive meadow and wetland areas, (b) prohibit grazing by recreation stock in overly sensitive areas, and (c) include specific "opening dates" for grazing by recreation stock wherever grazing is appropriate and allowed;

(4) Express support for the proposed group size limits for off-trail travel (8 persons, 8 animals), or suggest your own limits;

(5) Express support for the Forest Service's proposal not to upgrade Baxter, Sawmill, Taboose, and Shepherd

Another graphic example of the lies being spread by the BRC and other special interests is their claim that the Mt. Whitney trail would be closed to stock animals by this plan (BlueRibbon Magazine, 8/98), when in fact the Mt. Whitney trail has been closed to stock animals for more than 20 years.

Calendar

November 2: Comment deadline of the draft high sierra wilderness plan. See story on page 1.

November 12-13: California Biodiversity Council meeting in Susanville. Topics will include grazing and forest issues in north-eastern California. All are welcome. Call Ryan Henson at (530) 335-3183 for more information.

November 14: Adopt-a-Wilderness activist training in Santa Cruz. Learn how to become a steward of California's public lands. Call Ryan Henson at (530) 335-3183 for more information.

King Range beach closure

Continued from page 5

Meanwhile, nature has also cast its vote for the closure by sending a wave to destroy the Black Sands Beach parking lot. Now, anyone wishing to ride a vehicle on the beach must winch it down a cliff with cables (a few diehards have actually done this to avoid walking). The BLM says it does not have the money to repair the parking lot, and conservationists have urged the agency to keep spending its money elsewhere.

Activists should note that the conservation community did not have an active campaign to encourage the BLM to close Black Sands Beach to motor vehicles. In fact, the BLM's wilderness proposal for the King Range specifically excludes Black Sands Beach so that vehicle use could continue there. Thus, the closure proposal was initiated by BLM staff, not because of public pressure, but simply because it was the right thing to do. In a nation where public land managers are often overly timid and afraid of controversy—even to the point of ignoring ecological harm—the Arcata Field Office's decision to close Black Sands Beach is very refreshing and gratifying indeed.



What you can do

Please let the BLM know how much you appreciate what they have done by contacting:

Lynda Roush, Area Manager, BLM, Arcata Field Office
1695 Heindon Road, Arcata, CA 95521-4573
Phone: (707) 825-2300, Fax: (707) 825-2301
E-mail: lroush@ca.blm.gov

passes for stock travel (and provide your views regarding whether or not these and/or any other trails should be designated for "foot-travel-only");

(6) Tell the agency that it should address campfires by adopting elevations above which campfires are prohibited, with site-specific closures below those elevations as needed to protect wilderness resources. Most conservationists are recommending that the Forest Service adopt fire elevations of 9,600 ft. in the north and 10,000 ft. in the south in order to protect wilderness resources and to be consistent with the adjacent national parks; and,

(7) Ask that the draft plan be supplemented to incorporate quantifiable (numeric) noise standards to fully protect the natural quiet.

Write to: James L. Boynton, Forest Supervisor, Sierra National Forest, 1600 Tollhouse Road, Clovis, CA 93611-0532, Attn: Wilderness Direction Comments.

To request a copy of the draft plan, call Mike LeFevre of the Sierra National Forest at (209) 877-2218.

Tom Suk is a former wilderness ranger and a long-time CWC supporter.

Coalition Member Groups

American Lands Alliance; Washington, D.C
Ancient Forest Defense Fund; Leggett
Angeles Chapter, Sierra Club; Los Angeles
Back Country Horsemen of CA; Springville
Bay Chapter, Sierra Club; Oakland
Bay Chapter Wilderness Subcommittee; S.F.
California Alpine Club; San Francisco
California Mule Deer Association; Lincoln
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Friends of Plumas Wilderness; Quincy
Friends of the Garcia (FROG); Point Arena
Friends of the Inyo; Lee Vining
Friends of the River; Sacramento
Fund for Animals; San Francisco
Golden Gate Audubon Society; Berkeley

Hands Off Wild Lands! (HOWL); Davis
High Sierra Hikers Association; Truckee
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John Muir Project/Earth Island Institute; Pasa-
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Kern River Valley Audubon Society; Bakersfield
Kern-Kaweah Chapter, Sierra Club; Bakersfield
Klamath Forest Alliance; Etna
League to Save Lake Tahoe; South Lake Tahoe
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"Our Scriptures clearly teach that forests are a place where God dwells and cares lovingly for his creatures who inhabit them. Paying timber companies nearly a billion dollars every year to needlessly decimate these irreplaceable forests, which God created and loves, is to commit a sin of greed and waste."

—Ann Alexander, Chair of the Christian Environmental Council, which released a resolution calling for the end of commercial logging in national forests and all logging of old-growth forests elsewhere.

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