



WILDERNESS RECORD

Proceedings of the California Wilderness Coalition

March 1998

Forest Service puts the brakes on Mount Shasta Ski Project

After thirteen years of struggle, the proposed ski resort will likely be shelved

By Ryan Henson

Picture this: condominiums, a golf course, artificial lakes, restaurants, gondolas, vacation homes, and parking lots galore, all nestled at the base of dozens of clearcut ski runs gouged out of the side of one of California's most scenic highcountry locations. Is this Squaw Valley? Mammoth Lakes? Boreal Ridge? No, this was the fate intended for Mount Shasta by the now infamous Mount Shasta Ski Area, Incorporated (MSSA).

Thanks to Shasta-Trinity National Forest Supervisor Sharon Heywood, the nightmarish spectre of development hanging over Mount Shasta is one step closer to being exorcised. On February 19, Ms. Heywood announced her intention to recommend to the Regional Forester that he terminate the project. Heywood's final recommendation is pending a thirty-day comment period. After her recommendation is issued, Regional Forester Lynn Sprague will decide whether or not to terminate the project. His decision is subject to appeal by the developers.

MSSA first officially submitted its development proposal to the Forest Service in January of 1985. MSSA felt the project was necessary since the original Mount Shasta ski resort was destroyed by a mammoth avalanche in 1978. MSSA built substantial community support for the project in Redding and other north state communities by holding rallies, barbecues, dances, and publicity stunts. Even Santa Claus supported the project at one rally.

The developers and the Forest Service divided the ski resort proposal into several "phases" so that no single legally-required environmental impact document would present the total development picture—each document would only study a few development phases in a vacuum while ignoring the cumulative development impacts on the mountain. This arrogant blunder, as well as other self-inflicted legal wounds, made it very difficult for the Forest Service to legally approve the project.

The Shasta-Trinity National Forest quickly approved the first four phases of the project in 1986. After an administrative appeal was filed by the Mount Shasta Resource Council, Sierra Club Mother Lode Chapter, Mount Shasta Audubon Society, and the California Wil-



Mount Shasta as seen from the east. The Forest Service has recommended the rejection of a long-standing proposal to build a ski resort on the mountain. Photo by Phil Rhodes.

derness Coalition, the Forest Service was forced to study the proposal further in an environmental impact statement (EIS). This EIS was successfully appealed in 1988, and a revised version of the same EIS was again defeated by an appeal in 1989.

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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

The new paradigm of wilderness

"There is a growing consensus among academic and agency scientists that existing roadless areas—irrespective of size—contribute substantially to maintaining biodiversity and ecological integrity on the national forests."

—From a joint statement of 160 leading scientists, December 1997

Although he may not have known it, Forest Service Chief Mike Dombeck recently took a huge step toward changing the paradigm of wilderness in America.

In January, Chief Dombeck announced that the Forest Service would no longer build roads into many of the nation's last remaining roadless areas. This road construction moratorium is based on the "growing consensus" that roadless lands are immensely important for countless species of fish and wildlife, and are key to providing clean water.

In announcing the new policy, the Chief mentioned in passing the social benefits of roadless areas, but commented at length about the ecological importance of these areas. Wilderness advocates of years past might have scoffed at such a pronouncement. Wilderness, it was once believed, was primarily a recreational venue. Wilderness lands have historically been selected and protected based on the recreational and scenic opportunities they afford—not their ecological value.

Chief Dombeck called for unprecedented protections of roadless lands not solely because they are pretty or provide good hiking opportunities, but rather because of their ecological importance. And thus, the new wilderness ethic has taken root.

We have learned a lot in the 34 years since the Wilderness Act was signed. Recent scientific evidence has confirmed what many conservationists have argued for years—unprotected wilderness areas provide ecological value far greater than their small size. These roadless areas offer refugia for imperiled wildlife species, provide strongholds for salmon, and provide crystal clear water. In

short, we cannot have healthy ecosystems without vast tracts of protected roadless lands.

This is not to say that providing opportunities for recreation is not a good reason to protect wilderness. Anyone who has stood in line for a permit to visit the high Sierra knows that Californians need more outdoor recreation opportunities. The best way to create those opportunities, of course, is to protect more lands as wilderness. But what about the wildlands that no one cares to visit?

There is growing support among scientists for the protection of all roadless lands greater than 1,000 acres in size. Study after study has shown that roadless areas (or unprotected wilderness) are key to the recovery of ecosystems throughout the United States. Yes, we need more areas to hike, fish, camp and swim. And at the same time, we need a strategy for dealing with the ecological crisis taking place throughout California. Wilderness is the answer on both fronts.

The past emphasis on the recreational opportunities of potential wilderness areas, as opposed to the ecological importance of those areas, has led to serious inequalities in the types of lands protected. Wilderness boundaries in the Sierra Nevada, for example, closely follow tree lines. This has led to an abundance of "rock and ice" wilderness, but very little protection for lower elevation sites. And in the Sierra, most of the biological diversity is found in the foothills and mid-elevations. The mountaintops, though beautiful, are relatively sterile in comparison.

CWC recently initiated a campaign to protect California's last wild places. This campaign will certainly provide more recreational opportunities for Californians—this is, after all a prime use of wilderness lands. But we will also look beyond providing recreation opportunities. As we move forward, we will work to protect the critical wildlife habitat that dozens of species live in, and the water quality that Californians depend on. We are providing for the state's ecological future. And this, more than anything else, is what wilderness is all about.

By Paul Spittler

San Francisco Examiner can see the forest for the trees

CWC was highlighted in a recent San Francisco Examiner article describing the Clinton administration's recently released forest road policy. The article pointed out the millions of acres of roadless lands in California that were exempted from the policy and are still at risk to logging and road construction.

Dave Foreman shares his vision with Davis audience

CWC co-sponsored a recent speech by author, activist and The Wildlands Project founder Dave Foreman. The talk, entitled "A new approach to preserving wildlands; protecting the big outside," drew hundreds of people to the U.C. Davis campus. Foreman's rousing presentation called for a new conservation ethic based on the protection of North American biological diversity.

Patagonia funds Adopt-a-Wilderness

The Coalition recently received a \$7,000 grant from Patagonia to support our Adopt-a-Wilderness (AW) program. The AW program recruits and trains citizen wildlands guardians across California. Citizen training workshops were recently held in the Modoc, Sierra, and Plumas national forest regions. Thanks to Patagonia for continuing to fund this exciting program.

Welcome to South Yuba River Citizen's League

CWC welcomes its newest member group, the South Yuba River Citizens League (SYRCL). SYRCL is working to halt a dam that is proposed for the lower Yuba River. The dam would ruin miles of prime salmon spawning grounds and be a fiscal boondoggle for taxpayers. The Coalition welcomes SYRCL and wishes them the best as they work to keep the Yuba watershed pristine.

Forest Service Roadless Areas

Update:

Road-building moratorium spares millions of acres of wildlands

Others remain at risk while a long-term policy is in the works

By Paul Spitzer

In what could signal a change in direction for the embattled agency, Forest Service Chief Mike Dombeck announced in January that the Forest Service would temporarily stop constructing roads into millions of acres of wildlands across the United States while the agency develops a long-term policy for dealing with 440,000 miles of decaying national forest roads. The Chief's announcement came after months of speculation and intense lobbying by environmental organizations.

The policy responds to the campaign waged last year in Congress by conservationists and fiscal conservatives to eliminate federal funding for logging road construction. Although that campaign failed, close votes in the House and Senate sent a strong signal to the Clinton administration that the wasteful policy of building roads into unroaded forest areas should be stopped.

President Clinton announced last November that a new policy was in the works. As Clinton signed the Interior Appropriations bill (the bill containing the funding for new logging roads), he stated "Further, the Forest Service is developing a scientifically based policy for managing roadless areas in our national forests. These last remaining wild areas are precious to millions of Americans and key to protecting clean water and abundant wildlife habitat, and providing recreation opportunities. These unspoiled places must be managed through science, not politics."

Roughly 33 million acres of unprotected wilderness lands remain in the national forest system, including four million acres in California. Road construction will stop on much of this land for the next eighteen months while the administration develops a long-term road manage-

ment policy. While the policy will have only a limited effect in California, it will protect vast tracts of land in Idaho and Montana.

One reason that the policy will have minimal impact in California is that, despite the President's words, the policy appears to have been shaped tremendously by politics. All national forests in northern California, Oregon, Washington and Alaska were excluded from the road building moratorium. It is widely believed that Alaska was exempted to avoid the wrath of the state's virulent anti-environmental Senators and Congressman. Alaska contains more roadless lands than any other state—lands that will continue to be lost to logging and road construction.

Four forests in California were exempted: the Klamath, Six Rivers, Shasta-Trinity and Mendocino national forests. These forests contain only one quarter of our state's national forest land. However, in 1997, three quarters of all timber sales affecting roadless areas were within these four excluded forests. A recent report by conservation organizations showed that 5,690 acres of roadless lands were logged by the Forest Service in the northwest in 1997, much of that in California.

Despite the massive loopholes, the policy is a step in the right direction. Never before have so many potential

wilderness lands been protected by such a broad administrative action. This step presents a glimmer of hope that President Clinton can salvage his otherwise dismal conservation record, and that the Forest Service can be weaned from its long-standing timber addiction.

Chief Dombeck also announced that the agency is

developing a long-term policy for the management of the massive national forest road system. He identified three likely outcomes from this long-term policy: a reduction in the number of roads that are constructed, an elimination of roads that are no longer needed, and an upgrade of roads that currently receive heavy use.

Such an inventory is desperately needed. Over 232,000 miles of the national forest road system are in disrepair while the total budget for repairing

these roads is a whopping \$10 billion! These roads are "a timebomb waiting to go off" according to one scientist. They are the leading cause of water quality degradation on our national forests and each year cause massive amounts of sedimentation and erosion. Roads are also a leading cause of landslides and a prime culprit in the decline of native fisheries, including salmon.

Dombeck stated "...of all the things we do on national forests, road building leaves the most lasting imprint on the landscape." Many national forest roads can never be restored, leaving behind scarred ground and tattered forests. Eliminating some of the hundreds of thousands of miles of these roads is a good way to protect wildlife habitat, increase water quality and decrease the risk of landslides.

The timebomb is ticking and the integrity of our national forest ecosystems are at the end of the fuse. We've never had a better chance to protect roadless areas and it is up to us to assure that the Forest Service and President Clinton do not blow it again.



What you can do

Write a letter to: Gerald (Skip) Coghlan, Acting Director, Engineering Staff, US Forest Service, P.O. Box 96090, Washington, D.C. 20090-6090.

Request that the long-term national forest roads policy include the following:

- A permanent ban on road construction in all national forest roadless areas.
- Increased priority and funding for road decommissioning.
- A scientific inventory of roadless areas as small as 1,000 acres in size and a prohibition on road construction in these areas.

Letters are due by March 27. Thanks!

Paul Spitzer is the Executive Director of CWC.



Dark Canyon, Thomes Creek Roadless Area in the Mendocino National Forest. This area, a spotted owl reserve, is one of many northern California roadless areas excluded from the road-building moratorium. Photo by Ryan Henson.

Endangered Species

The California condor takes wing

Recovery efforts offer glimmer of hope for imperiled bird

By Robert Mesta

With a wing span of nearly ten feet and weighing approximately 22 pounds, the endangered California condor is one of the largest flying birds in the world, as well as one of the rarest. Over 10,000 years ago, condors, a member of the family of New World vultures, flourished in the prehistoric wilderness of the late pleistocene epoch. They ranged from southern Canada to northern Mexico in the west and across the southern United States to Florida.

During the pleistocene epoch condors fed on the carcasses of giant sloths, mastodons, woolly mammoths, and saber-toothed cats. The initial decline of the condor coincided with the extinction of these pleistocene mammals. However, unlike its prey, the condor survived extinction and was found living in the mountains of the Pacific Coast by European settlers in the early nineteenth century. These condors maintained a stable or perhaps increasing population by subsisting on mule deer, tule elk, pronghorn antelope, and a variety of marine mammals that washed up on the Pacific shore. Evidence indicates that condors returned to the southwestern portion of their range as early as the 1700s in response to the introduction of large herds of cattle, horses, and sheep, but were eventually eliminated by shooting and other forms of human persecution before they could become reestablished.

The second and more dramatic decline of the condor began with the settlement of the west coast, particularly during the California Gold Rush of 1849. Due to direct human impact that included wanton shooting, poisoning, specimen and egg collecting, and collisions with man-made structures, the condor population dwindled to 21 individuals by 1982. Its range was reduced to the mountains and foothills of California south of San Francisco to north of Los Angeles. Between 1982 and 1986, eggs and chicks were taken from the wild to create a captive breeding program to supplement the wild population. Despite efforts by biologists to stabilize the population, condors in the wild continued to decline until

there were only nine individuals left in 1985. This precipitous drop led to the controversial decision to bring the remaining wild condors into the existing captive breeding program to save the species. On April 19, 1987, the last wild condor was captured and for the first time in over 10,000 years the condor no longer graced the skies of North America. Only 27 survived, all living in zoos.

Five years later, due to the success of the captive breeding program, the population of California condors nearly doubled. The 1991 breeding season produced two

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A juvenile condor soars over the Sespe Condor Sanctuary, Los Padres National Forest. Photo by David Clendenen, courtesy Fish and Wildlife Service.

It takes a village: Partners promote multi-faceted recovery effort for the condor

By Jane Hendron

Cooperators and partners play an important role in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (FWS) California Condor Recovery Program. Participants in the Condor Recovery Program include the FWS's Hopper Mountain National Wildlife Refuge Complex (Refuge Complex), the U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, California State Department of Fish & Game, Arizona Game & Fish Department, San Diego Wild Animal Park, the Los Angeles Zoo, the Peregrine Fund, Ventana Wilderness Sanctuary, and local ranchers and dairies. These diverse agencies, organizations and individuals have combined their talents and expertise to implement a multi-faceted recovery effort including protection of habitat, education, research, and species reintroduction.

Protecting Condor Habitat

By the late 1800s, California condors were noticeably more scarce in the wild, prompting early efforts to protect this species and its habitat from human encroachment and disturbance. The Los Padres National Forest (LPNF) established the 1,200 acre Sisquoc Sanctuary in 1937 to protect nesting sites for the California condor. In 1947, a second, larger area was set aside by LPNF. Originally encompassing 35,000 acres, the Sespe Condor Sanctuary was expanded to 53,000 acres in 1954 and was the site of the first condor reintroduction in January, 1992. Both sanctuaries contain valuable nesting areas that may be utilized by the reintroduced condors, some of which are expected to begin breeding by the year 2000.

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Four reintroduced parent-reared condors feeding on a carcass at the Castle Crags release site, Machesna Mountain Wilderness Area, Los Padres National Forest. Photo by David Clendenen/FWS.

Wilderness News

California condor recovery efforts

Continued from previous page

Education

To increase awareness and understanding of the endangered California condor, the Refuge Complex and other Condor Recovery Program participants are actively involved with public education programs. Visits to local schools, presentations to civic groups, interpretive displays, websites, and distribution of printed materials are some of the methods used to educate the public about the condor and the ongoing effort to restore this species to the wild. Many people are now able to see free-flying condors when they visit portions of Los Padres National Forest and the Big Sur coast in California or the Vermilion Cliffs area in northern Arizona. The Refuge Complex, the Forest Service, the Peregrine Fund, the Bureau of Land Management and the Ventana Wilderness Sanctuary strive to provide public viewing opportunities while protecting the condors from potentially harmful interactions.

Research

Public and private agencies and universities are involved with a variety of research studies to secure the future of the California condor. Intensive research on the California condor first began in 1936 when Carl Koford initiated the first comprehensive study of the condor and its behavior. Research not only helps biologists to better

understand the life cycle and behavior of the California condor, it can also help to identify risks to the species. One example of the importance of research is the issue of lead poisoning. The identification of lead poisoning as one of the factors in the decline of the wild population of condors was not made until the 1980s when the FWS and its partner, the National Audubon Society, began bringing wild condors into captivity to begin a breeding program. Blood samples taken from some of these birds revealed high levels of lead—sometimes proving fatal. Research revealed that condors as well as turkey vultures, golden eagles, and other scavenger species were at risk from developing lead poisoning. The process begins when condors (or other scavenger species) ingest small fragments of lead contained in the carcasses of animals that have been shot. If the fragments remain in the intestinal tract for an extended period of time they begin to breakdown, thereby releasing toxins into the bloodstream. If left untreated, the level of toxins may increase to fatal levels. It is hoped that current research will lead to the development of a suitable, nontoxic alternative to lead bullets and shot.

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Legislative Roundup

Wilderness Act rewrite

Senators Larry Craig (R-Idaho) and Ron Wyden (D-Oregon) have introduced legislation that would dramatically weaken the Wilderness Act. S. 1489, the Outfitter Policy Act of 1997, would rewrite federal policies for outfitters and guides operating on public lands. The bill would weaken the Wilderness Act by: allowing commercial outfitters to construct permanent structures within wilderness areas, opening certain wilderness areas to motorized travel and allowing widespread commercial activities within wilderness areas. More aptly named the "Commercial Outfitter Subsidy Act," the bill would result in dramatically increased subsidies to commercial outfitters and would seriously degrade the character of the wilderness system.

Forest appropriations

President Clinton recently introduced the 1999 annual budget. The budget includes \$1 billion for logging in national forests and will continue the practice of using tax dollars to subsidize timber corporations that log public lands. Conservation organizations are supporting a Forest Appropriations Initiative which will establish new priorities for National Forest spending. The Appropriations Initiative would: eliminate subsidized logging, increase funding for prescribed fire, and prohibit new road construction within national forests. A budget battle is expected as Congressional conservatives attempt to keep federal dollars flowing to their corporate allies.

An act to save the giant sequoias

Representative George Brown (D-CA) has introduced H.R. 2077, the Giant Sequoia Ecosystem and Recreation Preserve Act, in the House of Representatives. The bill would create a Giant Sequoia National Forest Preserve in the Sequoia National Forest. The preserve would encompass hundreds of thousands of acres and include the last remaining unprotected giant sequoia groves.

Although the cutting of actual trees is currently prohibited, the giant sequoia ecosystems as a whole continue to be degraded by reckless logging, grazing and road construction. The act would set aside these gentle giants and their irreplaceable habitat for future generations.

Endangered Species: don't let the names fool you

Two bills, both called the Endangered Species Recovery Act, have been introduced in the House of Representatives and the Senate. The similarities end there however.

Representative George Miller (D-CA) introduced H.R. 2351 last summer. The bill is enjoying widespread bipartisan support (96 cosponsors) and an across-the-board endorsement from conservation groups. Miller's bill puts the practice into the theory behind the Endangered Species Act (ESA) by setting the standard for science-based recovery of species and providing incentives for property owners to support the recovery of endangered species.

Not one to be outdone, Senator Dirk Kempthorne (R-ID) introduced his industry-friendly ESA bill last September. Going by the same name as Miller's original bill, S. 1180 would do essentially the opposite. It would undermine the recovery of species on both public and private land, delay protections for species and ignore new scientific information.

Secretary of the Interior, Bruce Babbitt, under fire for his malfeasance in undermining the Fish and Wildlife Service's enforcement of the ESA, was an early supporter of the Kempthorne bill. The Clinton administration has subsequently endorsed the bill as well.

For species already on the edge of extinction, Kempthorne's bill would be the shove that pushes them over the brink.



WILDLANDS

THE WILDLANDS PROJECT

UPDATE

Greetings to all you folks who are wild about wilderness!

I ask you to think back on your last backcountry trip in some of California's blessed fourteen million acres of protected wilderness. What was it that dominated your view? Perhaps it was the craggy granite peaks and crystal-blue lakes of the high Sierra. Maybe it was the vast skies and geologic marvels of the desert.

What angers me is what is missing from these natural wonders. Don't get me wrong, I love the spectacular scenery and primordial experience of our existing wilderness areas. But where is the wildlife? What has happened to the parade of California native animals that rivaled the Serengeti's abundance?

With constant media reminders of the biodiversity crisis in tropical regions, it is important to remember that entire assemblages of species and their habitats are disappearing right here in the Golden State. Native grasslands in California have been reduced by 99 percent. Fifteen million acres of wetlands, valley oak forest, and riparian ecosystems were converted to agriculture before 1900. The hardest-hit natural communities were also among the most productive of wildlife habitats.

How have we lost so much while we have protected so much?

Dave Foreman has answered this question by examining the goals and arguments used to establish wilderness areas and national parks over the last century. Our successful arguments have focused on protecting lands because they were well-suited to wilderness as recreational areas, scenic monuments, economically "worthless lands," and municipal watersheds. Ecological integrity has been cited as a secondary justification for wilderness areas and national parks, if at all. Surprisingly, ecology and wilderness preservation have drifted so far apart that the Forest Service lumped its wilderness program under its division of recreation.

Today, life is facing the sixth great extinction event on earth—at rates unprecedented in life's history—due mostly to the overconsumption of five and a half billion humans. We have managed to put the planet's evolutionary potential in serious jeopardy.

So where do we go from here? We start by allowing no further destruction of wild lands. But no longer are we as conservationists content with protecting remnant and isolated roadless areas. The goal for nature reserves has moved beyond protecting scenery to protecting all of nature. The noted conservation biologist Reed Noss has charged: "Wilderness recovery is the most important task of our generation." While we do our best with recycling, living simply, and pollution control, it is only by restoring wilderness that whole ecosystems and their wildlife will flourish.

With The Wildlands Project, we are charting a course to the revival of wilderness for all ecosystems and habitats in California. Thinking big is fun, but there's work to be done. Call me at (530) 758-0380 to learn more about The Wildlands Project in your watershed.

—Rich Hunter is a Conservation Associate who coordinates The Wildlands Project in California.

Bureau of Land Management

Last chance to support closing the King Range National Conservation Area to off-road vehicles

By Ryan Henson

As we have reported over the last few months, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has proposed to close Black Sands Beach in the King Range National Conservation Area (NCA) to off-road vehicles. Conservationists have praised the BLM's decision, but off-road vehicle (ORV) enthusiasts have been lambasting them.

The agency needs more support so that next time they will not be afraid to make similarly difficult decisions on behalf of wild California.

The 60,000-acre King Range NCA is one of California's most spectacular wild lands. Situated in southwestern Humboldt County, the King Range is the longest stretch of undeveloped coastline remaining on the west coast of the United States. CWC, as well as other local, regional, and national conservation groups have promoted wilderness designation and improved management of the King Range for decades. Black Sands Beach is the last authorized ORV access on the west slope of the NCA. Closing

Currently, vehicles are damaging fragile sand dune ecosystems, frightening wildlife, causing erosion, and depositing large amounts of refuse

the area to vehicles will be one less obstacle to permanently protecting the region as wilderness.

As revealed in the environmental assessment (EA) for this project, backpacking in Black Sands Beach has increased fourteen fold during the period from 1973 to 1996. Conversely, ORV use decreased by 15 to 20 percent during the same period. The EA also cites a recreation study of the King Range NCA conducted by Humboldt State University which found that 62 percent of hikers and backpackers had "conflicts" with motorized vehicles

along Black Sands Beach. The EA also cites a 1993 Forest Service study which found that non-motorized recreationists visited the King Range primarily because of its "undisturbed natural setting" and lack of motorized vehicles.

Compelling ecological and political reasons also call for closing the beach to ORVs: Currently, vehicles are damaging fragile sand dune ecosystems, frightening wild-

life, causing erosion, and depositing large amounts of refuse. In addition, since Black Sands Beach is the last remaining portion of the King Range NCA accessible to motorized vehicles, closing it will help reduce opposition to designating the area as wilderness in the near future.



What you can do

Please send a letter supporting the closure of Black Sands Beach to ORVs to:

Lynda Roush
Area Manager
BLM Arcata Resource Area
1695 Heindon Road
Arcata, CA 95521
Fax (707) 825-2301
E-mail lroush@ca.blm.gov

It is always helpful to send copies of such letters to one or both of California's senators at:

The Honorable Barbara Boxer or the Honorable Dianne Feinstein

Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Gold diggers and dune buggies descend on the desert

By Ryan Henson

California's deserts have long been threatened by development. While the California Desert Protection Act of 1994 went a long way towards protecting fragile desert ecosystems, off-road vehicle (ORV) enthusiasts and mining conglomerates have their eyes set on despoiling what remains unprotected.

Two examples of this potential destruction include the Imperial Vehicle Plan and the proposed Imperial Project.

The Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) Vehicle Route Designation Update for the El Centro Resource Area may help preserve delicate desert habitats by closing many existing roads. However, a few roads in ecologically and culturally sensitive areas, including one former wilderness study area (WSA) and five areas of critical environmental concern (ACEC), currently closed, will be reopened by the plan. A WSA is a region the BLM has studied for its wilderness potential, and an ACEC designation is intended to protect the cultural and ecological values of sensitive landscapes. While WSAs receive a significant degree of protection, in some cases ACEC designation does little more than offer an awkward acronym to many BLM wild areas.

While the following key wild areas may have already suffered some degree of habitat fragmentation through ORV use or development, given their immense ecological and cultural values many conservationists believe they should be closed to ORVs before they are further degraded.

South Algodones Dunes: This area was once a WSA, but since Congress did not designate it as wilderness under the California Desert Protection Act, is now proposed as an ORV cross-country route by the BLM. If implemented, the Vehicle Route Designation Update will allow ORV use right up to the boundary of the adjacent North Algodones Dunes Wilderness Area and will allow ORVs to destroy sensitive dune plant and animal communities in the former WSA itself.

East Mesa ACEC: While four routes will be closed in this area, one new road will be opened, and nine other roads will remain open. This is essential habitat for the flat-tailed horned lizard, Algodones Dunes sunflower, Wiggins croton and the Colorado Desert fringe-toed lizard. Many important prehistoric cultural sites are also in the area.

Lake Cahuilla Number Six ACEC: According to the BLM, this area was designated as an ACEC in order to protect cultural resources which include prehistoric campsites. Despite this, five new roads will be opened in this area.

Lake Cahuilla Number Five ACEC: This area was designated as an ACEC by the BLM in order to protect prehistoric artifacts. The BLM is proposing to open three new roads in this area despite the primary reason for designating it an ACEC according was that "visitor-caused damage" threatened these cultural resources.

Lake Cahuilla Number Two ACEC: The BLM designated this area an ACEC in order to protect two extensive Native American village sites along the shore of the ancient Lake Cahuilla. Roads will be opened in the

southern portion of this area, and another existing route will remain open.

Yuha Basin ACEC: The BLM designated this area an ACEC in order to protect a variety of cultural and ecological resources such as rock carvings, village sites, hunting camps, historic trails, and prime habitat for the flat-tailed horned lizard. A large number of roads exist in this area, but they serve redundant purposes and their numbers should be greatly reduced. The BLM, however, has proposed that all the roads remain open, but to "restricted use." These roads also threaten the scenic and ecological values of the nearby Jacumba Wilderness.

The BLM is also considering allowing the mining

Glamis Imperial has also drawn the ire of Native Americans...who have historically used the area for religious and other cultural purposes. To them, Glamis Imperial's plans are a human rights abuse and an affront to their sovereignty.

Wilderness News

Condor takes wing

Continued from page 4

condor chicks eligible for release and on January 14, 1992 conservation history was made when the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) released these two chicks into the wilds of southern California. Thirteen more releases have been conducted in California and Arizona at five different sites, with a total of 67 condors released. Today's California condor population totals 132 individuals, currently 39 are flying free with the remaining 93 in captive breeding facilities at the Los Angeles Zoo, the San Diego Wild Animal Park, and the World Center for Birds of Prey, Boise, Idaho.

Captive bred condors scheduled for release to the wild are either raised by their parents or condor puppets to the age of three months, at which time they are placed in

Mount Shasta Ski Project

Continued from page 1

In 1990 a final EIS was released. In direct violation of the National Environmental Policy Act, the Chief of the Forest Service declared that no appeals of the final EIS would be allowed (the agency had apparently lost enough appeals at that point). The prestigious law firm Morrison and Foerster, which agreed to represent ski area opponents on a pro bono basis, began licking their chops at the prospect of litigating over this clearly illegal decision. In 1991, Judge David F. Levi confirmed the illegality of the Forest Service's decision by ruling that a 45-day appeal period was required for the final EIS.

Since then, many things have changed. For example, a battle over whether to place Mount Shasta on the National Register of Historic Places in the mid-1990s became yet another proxy fight over the ski area. In addition, the existing Mount Shasta Ski Park south of the proposed resort site appears to be meeting current regional skiing demand (Supervisor Heywood cited both the potential national register listing and the popularity of the current ski park as her reasons for recommending to terminate the project). In 1995, the mountain itself added its voice to the debate by sending an avalanche through the proposed ski area site. As the *Sacramento Bee* noted at the time, the avalanche "would have likely demolished a good piece" of the resort while "perhaps burying skiers and cars in the process." As in 1978, it became clear that the mountain would not tolerate another ski resort.

By threatening Mount Shasta, MSSA and the Forest Service managed to make the peak more popular than ever. Since the struggle over Mount Shasta began, the mountain has become increasingly popular with hikers, climbers, and vision seekers. This has led to conflicts with Native Americans in the region who resent their sacred mountain becoming a magnet for New Age devotees and "peak baggers." And yet, while the mountain suffers from over-crowding in a few areas, Mount Shasta is still a wonderfully wild, secluded, and yes, even sacred place worth protecting. Perhaps now the Forest Service and the mountain's many friends can devote themselves to keeping Shasta from being loved to death.



What you can do

You can help support Mount Shasta by writing to:

Sharon Heywood, Forest Supervisor, Shasta-Trinity National Forest, 2400 Washington Avenue, Redding, CA 96001, fax (530) 246-5045.

Please let her know that you support her recommendation to terminate the Mt. Shasta Ski Area project. Comments are due by March 20, 1998 (the Forest Service requests that you mark "MSSA" on the bottom left-hand side of the envelope). You may want to share your own thoughts about why the mountain is worth protecting.

Ryan Henson is a CWC Conservation Associate.

release pens located in the wild. At the release pen they form social bonds, mature and strengthen their wing muscles, and undergo aversion training to power poles. This threat has caused the death of five condors and threatened the lives of others. Young condors are released to the wild at approximately six months of age. Once released they are monitored electronically and visually. Each condor wears two radio transmitters, one placed on the wing and the other the tail. They are monitored visually using patagial wing markers. Newly released condors are fed carrion by biologists until they learn to locate carcasses on their own.

Currently, three California condor reintroduction sites are managing condors in the wild. The FWS is monitoring nineteen condors in the Santa Barbara County portion of the Los Padres National Forest (LPNF), while the Ventana Wilderness Sanctuary is monitoring five condors in the Monterey County portion of the same forest. The Peregrine Fund is monitoring fifteen condors in Coconino County in northern Arizona.

The success of the Condor Recovery Program highlights the concerted efforts of multiple agencies, organizations and individuals to avert the tragedy of extinction.

Robert Mesta is the Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's California Condor Recovery Program.

For more information contact him at (805) 644-1766.

Condor recovery efforts

Continued from page 5

Reintroduction

Beginning in 1992, captive-bred condors have been released to the wild on an annual basis. There are currently 39 California condors flying free over the skies of California and Arizona. It is an intensive effort to release and monitor these young condors. The Refuge Complex, the Peregrine Fund and the Ventana Wilderness Sanctuary are responsible for managing several release sites in California and Arizona. Responsibilities include conducting annual releases of juvenile condors to the wild, monitoring the behavior and movements of the birds on a daily basis, and providing clean sources of food for the young birds as they learn how to forage on their own. Private ranches and dairies as well as other cooperators provide a key source of support for the supplemental feeding program by providing access to stillborn calves on their property. The combination of public and private

Desert: ORV's and mine and threaten Imperial County wildlands

Continued from previous page

company Glamis Imperial Corporation, a subsidiary of Canadian-based Chemgold Inc., to create three gigantic pits and remove 600 million tons of rock and sand from a two and a half square-mile area in eastern Imperial County. Glamis Imperial's project is authorized under a controversial mining law passed in 1872 which forces the federal government to allow mining on federal land for literally pennies on the dollar.

To make matters worse, the proposed mine is only three-quarters of a mile away from the 7,700-acre Picacho Peak Wilderness, one and a half miles away from the 33,855-acre Indian Pass Wilderness, and less than ten miles away from the Colorado River. The proposed mine would dominate the horizon from several points in these wilderness areas and would help to ecologically isolate them through road construction and constant disturbance.

In addition to causing great ecological harm, Glamis Imperial has also drawn the ire of Native Americans in the region who have historically used the area for religious

partnerships has enabled the FWS to reintroduce condors into more portions of their historic range.

For more information about the California Condor Recovery Program contact Jane Hendron at the Hopper Mountain Wildlife Refuge by calling (805) 644-5185.

Calendar

March 14-15: Public Interest Environmental Law Conference, Eugene Oregon. Organized by Friends of Land Air Water, the conference will offer a variety of workshops, speakers and panelists. For more information call (541) 346-3828 or e-mail L-A-W@law.uoregon.edu. Register online at www.pielc.uoregon.edu.

March 21: Public meeting on the Forestdale Creek Area. Turtle Rock Park, Alpine County. This is a working meeting to identify issues related to winter use of this area of the Toiyabe National Forest. For more information on the issue contact Marcus Libkind of the Nordic Voice at (510) 455-5816 or e-mail him at marcus@nordicvoice.org. For information about the meeting or in the event of bad weather call the Carson Ranger District at (702) 882-2766.

March 27: Steelhead Workshop: Issues and Implications, U.C. Santa Barbara. Among the topics: status of the Southern California steelhead, genetics, protection under the ESA, history of the listing, and balancing flood protection with recovery plans. The instructor is Mark Capelli, M.A. For more information contact UCSB Extensions at (805) 893-4143 or e-mail masst@xlrn.ucsb.edu or see their website at www.xlrn.ucsb.edu.

and other cultural purposes. To them, Glamis Imperial's plans are a human rights abuse and an affront to their sovereignty.

In terms of logging and (believe it or not) grazing reform, the BLM is years ahead of its sister agency the Forest Service. But when it comes to ORVs and mining, it still has a long way to go.



What you can do

Please write to Senators Feinstein and Boxer and ask them to oppose the Imperial Stripmine Project. Request that they also do everything in their power to curb off-road vehicle use on California's public lands. You can reach the senators by writing:

The Honorable Dianne Feinstein or Barbara Boxer, Senate Office Building Washington, DC 20510, Washington, DC 20510. E-mail: senator@feinstein.senate.gov, or senator@boxer.senate.gov.

Ryan Henson is a CWC Conservation Associate.

Coalition Member Groups

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 California Native Plant Society; Sacramento Center for Sierra Nevada Conservation; Georgetown
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 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
 International Center for Earth Concerns; Ojai
 John Muir Project/Earth Island Institute; Pasadena
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 Mother Lode Chapter, Sierra Club; Sacramento
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"I realize this proposed recommendation is controversial. Though the recommendation is personally difficult to make, professionally I believe it is the right thing to do."

—Shasta-Trinity National Forest Supervisor Sharon Heywood, on her decision to recommend the termination of the Mount Shasta Ski Project.

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