



WILDERNESS RECORD

Proceedings of the California Wilderness Coalition

April 1998

Fish and Wildlife Service finally protects California's desert bighorns

By Jane King

Environmentalists around the state breathed a collective sigh of relief in late March as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced the listing of the Peninsular bighorn sheep as a federally protected endangered species. The listing culminates years of litigation on behalf of the bighorns, including a 1995 lawsuit brought by the Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund that claimed the federal delay in listing the species as endangered had contributed to its decline.

The drop in bighorn sheep numbers is indeed alarming. Currently, there are only 280 animals in California, down from about 1,170 in 1971, a 76 percent population decrease. In addition to associated problems with disease and increased predation by mountain lions, the fundamental problem is directly linked to human invasion of the habitat, with housing and golf resort developments taking over large desert valley and foothill areas.

The Peninsular bighorn live in approximately 500 miles of contiguous habitat in the hot desert mountain ranges, from the San Jacinto and Santa Rosa mountains near Palm Springs, California, south to the Volcan Tres Virgenes Mountains, north of Santa Rosalia, Baja California Sur, Mexico. The California Peninsular Mountain Range's only bighorn species, they bear their lambs on the steep inclines, but forage for food and water in the lower foothills, the areas most popular for resort and housing development.

This region includes the Coachella Valley, in which bighorn sheep have declined 35 percent more than in more remote areas. The valley has seen enormous human population growth in recent years. According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, population projections show an increase from 227,000 to over 497,000 by the year 2010, which doesn't include up to 200,000 seasonal residents. Joan Taylor, Conservation Chairwoman for the Sierra Club's San Gorgonio chapter, points out that the golf resorts and housing developments, of which there are seventeen new projects currently proposed, endanger the bighorns in many ways. Sheep have died, for instance, from eating non-native vegetation, and from being hit by cars, "lured by green grass to our urban areas."



The Peninsular bighorn sheep, now listed as an endangered species by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, has seen its population plummet to 280 individuals in California's desert habitat. Photo by Mike McWherter.

Ironically, the bighorn, with its massive antlers, provides a popular symbol for the area's resorts and towns. A proposed golf course, for instance, will be named, "Canyons at Bighorn," according to the Los Angeles Times. The community's blurred vision about the fact that these very developments are causing the damage is illustrated in a quote by Rancho Mirage City Councilwoman Marilyn Glassman, who told the Times, "The sheep are the symbol

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ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

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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

When Forest Service Chief Mike Dombeck recently directed the agency to stop building roads into national forest roadless areas, he created a serious quandary for the Forest Service's Region 5 (California). The last comprehensive inventory of national forest roadless areas was completed in 1979. Two decades of logging, road construction and development have chipped away at these precious areas. In 1998, the agency doesn't know what roadless land remains—which will make it difficult to set these areas off-limits to road construction.

In 1979, the Forest Service inventoried the state's 24 million acres of national forest land in an effort to identify all parcels that may qualify as wilderness. The survey documented roadless areas greater than 5000 acres in size and smaller roadless areas that are adjacent to existing wilderness. This survey was called RARE II, the Roadless Area Review and Evaluation. (The original survey, RARE I, was ruled inadequate by a federal judge after a lawsuit brought by the State of California. The lawsuit, filed under the leadership of Governor Jerry Brown and Resource Secretary Huey Johnson, argued that the survey had missed tracts of roadless lands and had failed to recognize the wilderness potential of numerous key roadless areas.)

RARE II identified 331 roadless areas throughout the state, containing just over six and a half million acres of roadless lands. That was nearly twenty years ago. Since that time, California's public lands have been affected by over two decades of logging, road construction, mining, ski-area development and off-road vehicle use. Forest fires, followed by intense post-fire logging, have ravaged some of our finest roadless lands. Also, wilderness bills have protected over two million acres of California roadless lands. The times have changed tremendously.

Unlike the Bureau of Land Management, which has kept accurate records of the status of its roadless lands, the Forest Service has no such accounting system. In fact, many national forests have conveniently stopped recognizing roadless lands at all, instead merely considering

them just another part of the timber base. Ask the agency about the status of its roadless lands—how much has been lost, how much saved, and how much is still at risk—and you're likely to receive a blank stare. The truth is, the Forest Service has no idea how much roadless land remains.

This is a huge problem as roadless areas are a precious resource. President Clinton acknowledged this last November when he called for the protection of roadless lands based on their ecological and recreational values. A growing army of scientists has echoed the President's call, urging for the protection of all roadless lands for the benefit of wildlife, water quality and overall ecological health.

What has happened to our state's potential wilderness? The Pilot Creek Roadless Area in the Six Rivers National Forest has been laced with roads and clearcuts. The area once totalled over 9,300 acres, but has been cut in half by reckless logging. Which other areas have been lost? Which remain at risk?

To answer these questions, CWC is preparing a report on the status of California's roadless areas. The report will examine each of the 331 roadless areas surveyed in 1979 to determine which areas have been protected as wilderness, which have been lost to logging, road construction and development, and which areas remain at risk. The report will be the first comprehensive look at California's roadless lands since they were identified in 1979.

Such a report is desperately needed. As Wilderness Society founder Robert Marshall stated, "The universe of wilderness is disappearing like a snowbank on a south-facing slope on a warm June day." As difficult as the task may be, we need to document what has been lost in order to show the importance and rarity of the remaining roadless lands. Such information will strengthen our case as we move forward with our proposal to protect the state's most enduring legacy—our remaining roadless lands.

By Paul Spitler

Goldman Fund backs roadless area inventory

The Richard and Rhoda Goldman Fund recently granted CWC \$20,000 to complete a report on the status of California's roadless areas. Roadless areas, or unprotected wilderness, were last surveyed by the U.S. Forest Service in 1979. Since that time, many areas have been protected as wilderness, while others have been lost to logging and road construction. Our roadless area report will chronicle the impact of twenty years of logging and road-building on California's last roadless lands. We appreciate the generous support of the Richard and Rhoda Goldman Fund.

Town Creek Foundation, director boost CWC's programs

The Town Creek Foundation granted the Coalition \$20,000 to support CWC's work in 1998. The support will be used to further our Adopt-a-Wilderness, wildlands defense, and wilderness advocacy efforts, as well as supporting our public education program. Thanks, Town Creek!

Town Creek Director Ted Stanley matched the Foundation's gift with a personal \$20,000 donation. The gift from Mr. Stanley will be used to hire Celia Barotz to

coordinate the Wildlands 2000 campaign (see below). With a campaign coordinator on board, the Wildlands 2000 campaign will continue to gain momentum, and our efforts to save these last wild places will be greatly enhanced. Thanks to Ted Stanley for the generous gift!

Coordinator to lead the Wildlands 2000 campaign

After a three month hiatus, the CWC has re-hired Celia Barotz to coordinate the Wildlands 2000 campaign. Celia worked briefly as a CWC development associate at the end of 1997, and helped bring the Coalition much needed financial support. Celia will now turn her talents towards leading the effort to permanently protect California's last remaining wild places. The timing could not be better as the Wildlands 2000 campaign is picking up speed throughout the state. Welcome back, Celia!

WILDLANDS 2000

SAVING CALIFORNIA'S LAST WILD PLACES
CAMPAIGN MEETING

- Hear an update on the campaign.
- Learn wilderness mapping skills.
- Take part in the state's next major wilderness effort!
- Saturday, May 16, 1998, 10-4 at the Village Homes Community Center in Davis. Call Paul Spitler at (530) 758-0380 to RSVP or for more information.

Wilderness News

A bad neighbor for the Mojave National Preserve

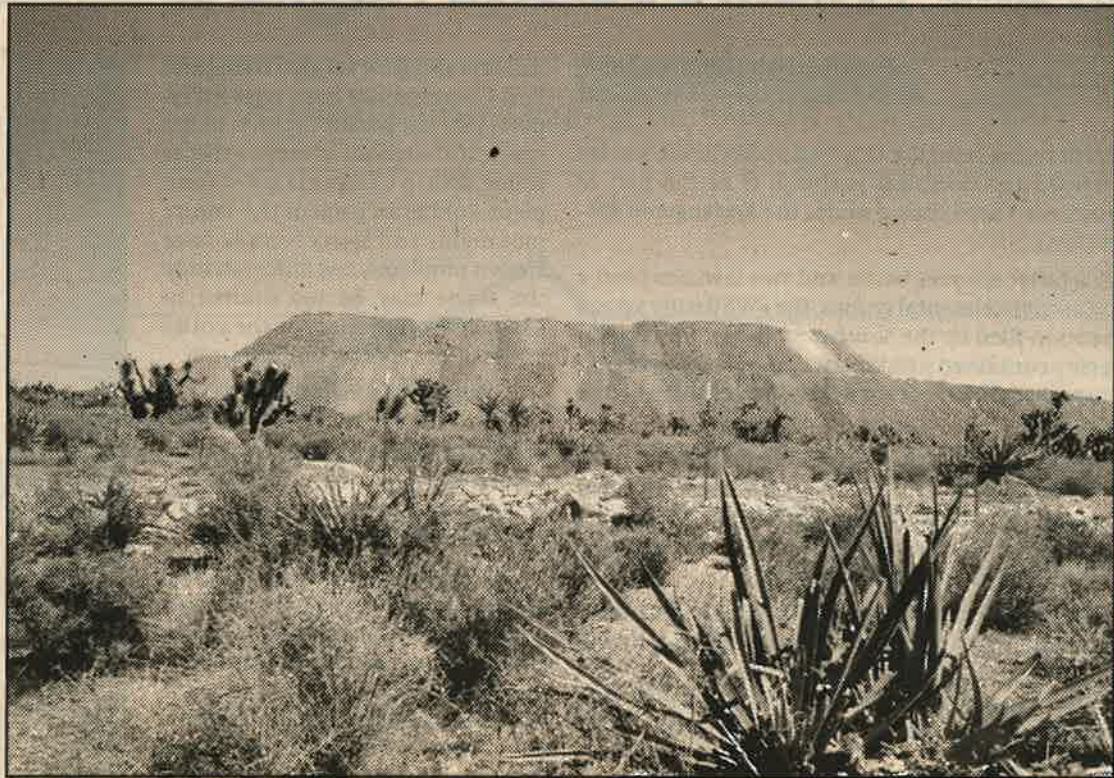
The nation's largest rare earth mine wants to get even bigger

By Mitch Tobin

"We've got a lot of problems back there, son—we wouldn't want your pretty little self to get hurt," says an elderly security guard. I'm at the gates to Molycorp's Mountain Pass Mine, hoping to tour the facility. I'm not surprised at being stonewalled, but I am a bit shocked by the guard's honesty. The mine certainly does have its problems. Two years ago, Molycorp spilled radioactive and hazardous wastes onto federally protected lands and now it hopes to expand its operations by fifty percent over the next three decades. I snoop around the perimeter of the site, take some photos, and then take off—after all, I'm hanging out beside California's number one toxic polluter.

The Mountain Pass Mine is also the nation's largest rare earth mine. Rare earth minerals, also called lanthanides, are used in a wide mix of applications, including catalytic converters, petroleum refining, and television screens. Located 15 miles south-west of the California-Nevada border, the site is nearly surrounded by Mojave National Preserve (MNP). It lies amidst a typical Mojave

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A 100-foot tailings pile at the Mountain Pass Mine near Mojave National Preserve. Molycorp wants to expand the mine, already the largest polluter in the state, by fifty percent. Photo by Mitch Tobin.

Wildlands 2000: Saving California's last wild places

By Paul Spittler

Four years after the California Desert Protection Act protected millions of acres of pristine desert lands, CWC has launched a new statewide wilderness effort. The Wildlands 2000 campaign aims to protect all of the state's remaining potential wilderness lands.

The need for a new wilderness campaign could not be greater. In 1997 alone, fourteen timber sales threatened nine different potential wilderness areas within the state. Within the Modoc National Forest, an energy company is proposing to run power lines through the heart of an unprotected wilderness area. Further south, potential additions to the Picacho Peak Wilderness Area are threatened by a massive gold mine. Without permanent protection, our last unprotected wilderness lands will continue to be jeopardized—and there is still so much at stake.

Over 400 potential wilderness areas can currently be found within California's public lands. Most are areas you've never heard of: the Duncan Canyon Roadless Area in the Tahoe National Forest, for example. Other areas are better known: the King Range, in the heart of the Lost Coast, and the beautiful White Mountains, east of the Sierra Nevada. What these areas all have in common is that they contain much of the most pristine remaining wildlands to be found anywhere in California. And many of them are still vulnerable to logging, mining, road construction and grazing.

Designating land as wilderness is the best way to assure that it is protected into the future. Wilderness is a legislative designation, meaning it cannot be overturned administratively. Even if anti-environmentalists took over the White House, they could not undo California's 14 million acres of wilderness.

There have been several major wilderness bills affecting California's lands. The most notable are the 1984 California Wilderness Act, championed by the legendary Phil Burton, and the 1994 Desert Protection Act which created 69 new wilderness areas and protected over seven million acres of public land. While there are no accurate assessments of current unprotected wilderness acreage in the state, we estimate that from five to seven million acres remain.

Excitement over the passage of the 1994 desert bill, combined with the Republican takeover of Congress, led to a lull in wilderness planning in California. Conservationists have been too busy struggling to prevent anti-environmental measures from Congress to work on a proactive wilderness campaign. Until now. The Wildlands 2000 campaign was born out of a statewide meeting hosted by CWC in October and promises to become the most important public lands protection effort to arise since the Desert Protection Act.

The first step in this multi-year campaign is to undertake an intensive inventory of the state's remaining wildlands. This inventory is now underway. Conservation organizations and citizens from across the state are working to identify, survey, describe, and photograph local wild areas. With over 400 potential wilderness areas and thousands of smaller parcels scattered throughout the state, this is a huge undertaking.

Citizens from around the state are currently writing descriptions of local wild areas. Many of these citizens were recruited and trained through CWC's Adopt-a-Wilderness program. Others are citizens who may live far away from potential wilderness lands, but have an interest in assuring that our last wild areas are protected for

future generations. Once the descriptions and draft maps are complete, we will lead a summer of intensive field checking to determine the suitability and level of human disturbance in the potential wilderness lands.

We expect the inventory to be completed by December 1998. At that time, we will survey the results and draft a proposal to protect the state's last unprotected wilderness. This proposal will likely be presented to Congress as well as the appropriate land management agencies. While only Congress can designate land as wilderness, land management agencies have the ability to administratively protect all potential wilderness lands. As the recent national forest road building moratorium shows, we can protect lands administratively. This may well be our next step in assuring that all potential wilderness lands receive permanent protection.

We have been fighting defensive battles for too long. Each timber sale that threatens a roadless area or mine that threatens a potential desert wilderness area drives home the need to permanently protect some wildlands for our future. The Wildlands 2000 campaign aims to do just that.

What you can do



Take part in the campaign! We need help in completing the inventory. This involves surveying, describing, mapping and photographing California's most scenic and pristine unprotected wildlands. To receive more information about getting involved in the Wildlands 2000 campaign, contact CWC at (530)758-0380.

Paul Spittler is the Executive Director of CWC.

Endangered Species

Goshawk on its way to listing in the Western states Fish and Wildlife Service forced to assess raptor's status

By Rich Hunter

A recent ruling from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) helped the northern goshawk clear the first of three hurdles to final listing under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

After a bitter six-year battle and two lawsuits from a coalition of environmental groups, the FWS finally agreed that a petition filed by the Southwest Center for Biological Diversity contained substantial scientific information that may warrant listing of the goshawk as endangered in Western states.

The northern goshawk is a raptor which inhabits old-growth forests throughout the West. In California and the Southwest, the goshawk primarily favors drier ponderosa pine and mixed conifer forests where its habitat is threatened by logging and overgrazing.

The FWS had delayed the goshawk listing process for six years, twice denying the petition to consider listing the imperiled raptor. A coalition of environmental groups representing every state in the West filed lawsuits that overturned the two denials and forced the FWS to issue the positive ruling.

Next steps for listing

The FWS will study the status of the northern goshawk throughout its Western range (except Alaska). If the goshawk meets the criteria for listing, the agency will conduct a public review process on a proposed rule to list the raptor. Then the FWS may issue a final rule that lists the goshawk as threatened or endangered in specific parts of its range.

Due to the precarious status of the bird and its habitat, the outlook is good for a listing. The ESA prohibits the FWS from considering economic factors in determining whether the goshawk warrants listing.

Scientific data that documents the decline of the species is critical for the proposal to list. While the

Arizona and New Mexico Game and Fish Commissions have released reports that document declines of the species throughout its range in those states, data in California is less complete. Studies in parts of the Trinity mountains and Sierra Nevada have shown problems, but unfortunately the scope may be too limited to make generalizations for the entire range of the species in California.

What will a listing mean?

Everybody knows from the saga of the northern spotted owl how powerful the ESA becomes for protecting ancient forests when old-growth wildlife species are listed.

The intense political pressure which delayed this process for six years gives a clear idea of the potential reductions in logging. Although their own biologists had proposed to accept the petition, FWS bureaucrats twice ordered the denial on unsubstantiated grounds.

Kieran Suckling, of the Southwest Center for Biological Diversity, which filed the petition, believes "a proposed listing from the Fish and Wildlife Service will send the Forest Service scrambling to implement conservation measures." The Forest Service currently considers the goshawk a "sensitive species," but there is no conservation strategy in place to protect the bird. Listing the goshawk could extend protection for old-growth habitat to the drier forests that are outside the range of the wetter forests protected for the northern spotted owl.



The northern goshawk. The likely listing of this raptor could help to protect its habitat in the drier forests not favored by the northern spotted owl. Photo by John Keane, courtesy U.S. Forest Service.

Endangered Species Act under attack

Although the potential listing may seem promising for the goshawk and its old-growth habitat, industry and private-property sympathizers have introduced bills in both the House of Representatives and the Senate that undermine the Act's ability to protect species.

Rich Hunter is a Conservation Associate for CWC.

Update: Doolittle's Emigrant Dams bill moves forward

Congressman John Doolittle's other dam bill, which passed the House last July, is heading for a hearing in the Senate. The Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee will consider H.R. 1663 in late March. Doolittle's bill would require the Forest Service to maintain eighteen dams found within the Emigrant Wilderness.

Many of the dams are a scourge upon the wilderness, have outlived their usefulness, and ought to be removed. But Mr. Doolittle, rebuffed again in his attempt to dam the American River at Auburn, has persisted with his latest anti-wilderness legislation. Doolittle's "Dam it all" attitude recently raised the ire of former Senator Alan Cranston, the author of the legislation creating the Emigrant Wilderness. "As then, there is no good reason now to perpetuate these structures in contradiction to the requirements of the Wilderness Act." Cranston wrote in a letter urging Senator Dianne Feinstein to oppose the bill.

The northern goshawk: highly adapted to its shrinking habitat

The fiery red eye caught sight of us, and he was gone into the depths of the forest with a quick burst of speed. After tramping all day through timber sale units on the Stanislaus National Forest, my only look at a northern goshawk left me speechless. This raptor is rarely seen in its rapidly disappearing old-growth home.

The largest of the birds of prey known as accipiters, northern goshawks have short, powerful wings and long, broad tails with beautiful, flecked blue and gray plumage. Near the top of the food web in old-growth forests throughout the West, goshawks are considered key indicators of the health of these systems. National forests in California have weak guidelines for protecting goshawk habitat. The guidelines, which appear to be designed for continued logging of mature forests, are based on the idea that logging-dependent prey species are of primary importance to goshawk survival.

However, goshawks are specifically adapted for slicing through dense, older forests and thick brush to deliver lightning-quick talon strikes to their prey. Goshawks are "sit-and-wait" predators of more than 50 species of forest birds and mammals. They perch in low, hidden spots and their short wings enable them to burst

out after prey. Their long tails act as rudders for precise turning in dense forests.

Not only are goshawks well-adapted for hunting in ancient forests, but they also generally select nest sites that have the large trees and dense canopies common in old-growth. Their large nests seem to require large trees, and there is optimal space in and below the canopy of old-growth forests for pursuit and capture of prey. Recognized as the totem animal for all forest activists, goshawks commit to a single patch of forest and defend it vigorously.

By swooping on human and animal intruders alike, goshawks defend an area of at least 25 acres surrounding their nests. In the absence of logging, they are likely to use the same nest for ten years. Some studies have found a direct correlation between the rate of nest reoccupation and the severity of logging.

Recent research in the southwest and California has documented drastic declines in the goshawk's mating success, and thus the species is on its way to listing under the Endangered Species Act.

—Rich Hunter

National Forests

New Forest Service numbers show an increase in logging under the "salvage" rider

By Ryan Henson

The Forest Service recently released a report detailing the amount of logging that occurred in fiscal year 1996. Confirming what many conservationists have been saying, it indicates the the "salvage" rider of 1995-96 did in fact increase logging in California's national forests and that many national forests in the state are losing tremendous amounts of money in their below-cost timber sales.

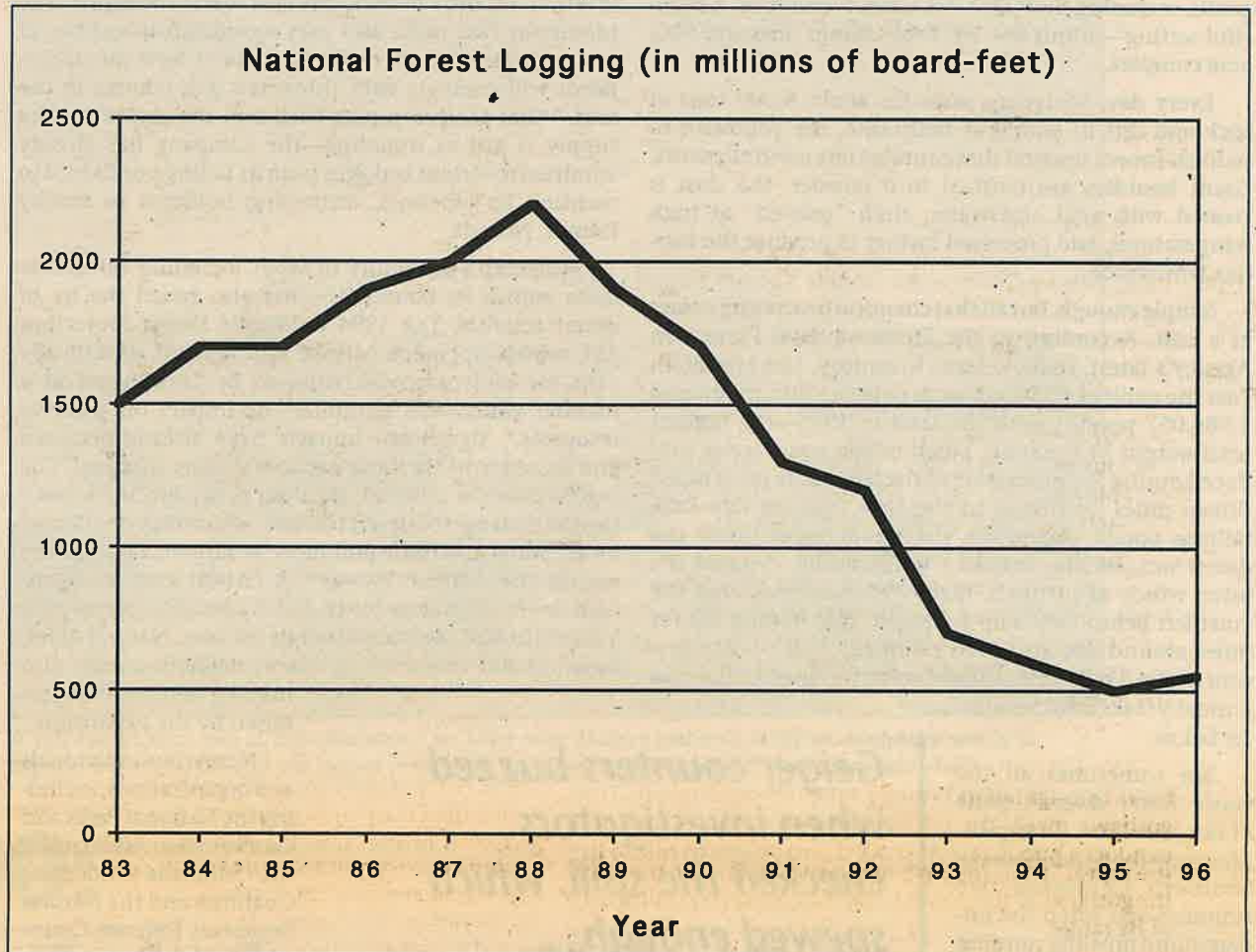
The report reveals that California's national forests cut 548.2 million board feet (MMBF) of forest from 41,791 acres (sixty-five square miles). This represents roughly 109,640 logging-truck loads leaving California's national forests. For perspective, this represents an increase over 1995, but it still marks an overall decline from the notoriously unsustainable days of the 1980s.

Individual national forests in California were logged to varying degrees as shown in the list below:

National forest	Board feet logged
Angeles	300,000
Cleveland	200,000
Eldorado	20,400,000
Inyo	8,900,000
Klamath	44,900,000
Lake Tahoe Basin	18,400,000
Lassen	93,000,000
Los Padres	500,000
Mendocino	6,400,000
Modoc	58,600,000
Plumas	41,800,000
San Bernardino	1,600,000
Six Rivers	24,800,000
Sequoia	16,700,000
Shasta-Trinity	50,300,000
Sierra	49,000,000
Stanislaus	32,600,000
Tahoe	79,700,000

As these numbers indicate, the Lassen National Forest once again leads the state in logging, followed by the Tahoe National Forest. Most of the logging in these forests involved so-called salvage logging, the cutting of supposedly dead, dying, or diseased trees. This salvage logging was accelerated by the passage of the "salvage rider," an amendment to an appropriations bill that effectively suspended all environmental laws applying to national forest logging in 1995-1996. Had it not been for this surgical strike at environmental regulations, 1996 logging levels would have decreased.

In addition to presenting raw data, the report also attempts to promote and justify the Forest Service's timber sale program, often in glowing terms. This task has become more difficult, however, since both Congress and the Clinton



administration are increasingly questioning the former mainstay of the agency's timber sale program: below-cost timber sales. For example, responding to public and Congressional pressure, President Clinton announced a plan in 1993 to phase-out all taxpayer-subsidized timber sales within four years. The plan failed, but it did serve to improve the agency's accounting system, which, ironically, now highlights how much money the Forest Service really loses.

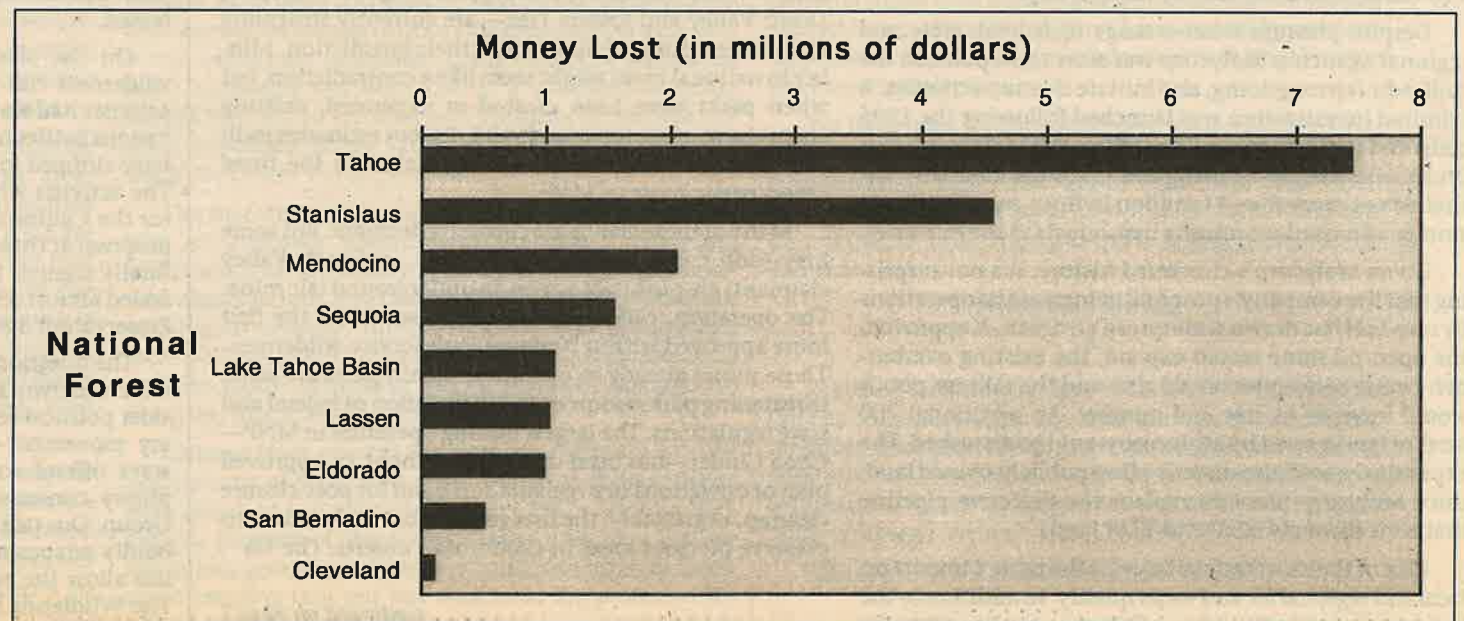
In 1996, ten California national forests lost money, including the two logging leaders.

To illustrate the severity of these losses, consider that this means that (using the estimate of 5,000 board feet per log-truck load) the Mendocino National Forest lost \$1,589 per truck-load of logs.

In an age when the Forest Service complains that they cannot manage campgrounds, empty trash bins, and maintain trails, the agency is essentially paying the timber industry to haul trees away. Adding insult to injury, this corporate welfare is often conducted to the detriment of wildlife, sensitive plants, water quality, and other priceless values, and is continuing at a time when the Forest Service has begun to charge the public fees for the use of many of our national forests.

This year's budget battles over the Forest Service's road construction and logging budgets will give us an opportunity to fund restoration over extraction and "subsidize" public values and interests over corporate welfare. Stay tuned for news on how you can help.

Ryan Henson is a Conservation Associate for CWC.



Wilderness News

Mountain Pass Mine

Continued from page 3

desert landscape—Joshua trees, yucca plants, and jagged peaks, including the 8,000 foot Clark Mountains. A beautiful setting—minus the 100-foot tailings piles and 900-acre complex.

Every day, Molycorp unearths about 8,000 tons of rock and dirt in search of bastnasite, the yellowish to reddish-brown mineral that contains rare earth elements. Giant boulders are crushed into powder, the dust is treated with acid and water, then "roasted" at high temperatures, and processed further to produce the various lanthanides.

Simple enough, but all that chemical processing comes at a cost. According to the Environmental Protection Agency's latest Toxic Release Inventory, the Mountain Pass site emitted 96,055 pounds of toxics into the air and 1,986,057 pounds onto the land in 1995—the highest total output in the state. Much of the waste water produced during the processing of the bastnasite ore is piped fifteen miles northwest to the New Ivanpah Dry Lake tailings ponds. There, the water evaporates under the desert sun, leaving behind a toxic residue. Because it's often windy at Ivanpah, many are concerned that the crust left behind ends up in the air, threatening life for miles around. It's also been estimated that twenty percent of the 3 billion pounds of water pumped to the lake annually leaks into the aquifer below.

But sometimes all the waste water doesn't quite make it to Ivanpah. Molycorp made headlines in Southern California two summers ago when the underground pipeline running between Mountain Pass and Ivanpah ruptured seven times, spilling 234,000 gallons. The worst spill occurred on a stretch of Bureau of Land Management (BLM)

land about four miles from the border of MNP. The company had previously claimed its waste water wasn't dangerous, just highly saline. It turned out the pipes were carrying a nasty cocktail of toxic and radioactive substances. Geiger counters buzzed when investigators checked the spill, which spewed enough radioactive debris to fill thirty 55-gallon drums. Further inspection of the Ivanpah pond led to the discovery of radium at 15,000 times the EPA level allowed at Superfund sites. Uranium and lead in the pond existed at rates 250 and 138 times federal standards, respectively.

Despite pressure from a range of federal, state and regional agencies, Molycorp was slow to respond to the spill, admit wrongdoing, and initiate cleanup activities. A criminal investigation was launched following the 1996 spills and is still ongoing. The spill wasn't Molycorp's first brush with the law—during the 1990s the company has shelled out more than \$1 million in fines, most for illegal storage of hazardous mining byproducts at the mine site.

Given Molycorp's checkered history, it's not surprising that the company's proposal to increase its operations by one-half has drawn widespread criticism. If approved, the open pit mine would expand, the existing overburden (waste rock) piles would rise, and the tailings ponds would increase in size and number. An additional 700 acres of land owned by Molycorp would be disturbed. The expansion would also directly affect publicly-owned land, since Molycorp plans to replace the defective pipeline that runs through MNP and BLM lands.

One of the most serious issues is the mine's impact on local and regional air and water quality. In addition to the hazardous and radioactive substances at the mine site

and in the tailings ponds, there are worries about elevated levels of airborne particulates and diesel emissions. The Mountain Pass mine also uses significant quantities of ground water and there are fears about how the mine's needs will compete with three new golf courses in the area. What Molycorp puts back into the region's water supply is just as troubling—the company has already admitted to serious leakages from its tailing ponds (not to mention its pipeline), distressing residents in nearby Primm, Nevada.

Molycorp's proximity to MNP, including wilderness areas within its boundaries, has also raised the ire of desert activists. The 1994 California Desert Protection Act, which upgraded Mojave's protection, specifically calls for Molycorp's activities to be "conducted in a manner which will minimize the impact on preserve resources." Significant impacts have already occurred and more are likely if the expansion wins approval. The region provides critical habitat for many species, including the endangered desert tortoise, which may be affected by air, water and noise pollution. Mountain Pass also lies within the "Pacific Flyway," a critical area in North America for migratory birds, and evaporation ponds pose a threat to birds passing through the area. Natural quiet, darkness and viewsheds in nearby wilderness areas also may be further compromised by the expansion.

Numerous individuals and organizations, including the National Parks and Conservation Association, the California Wilderness Coalition and the Natural Resources Defense Council, raised the issues mentioned above in scoping comments for a joint Environmental Impact Report (EIR) and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) on the Mountain Pass

expansion. The joint EIR/EIS is being handled by San Bernadino County and the BLM. It's unclear when the actual EIR/EIS will be released—officials with San Bernadino County and the BLM say the myriad government agencies, regulations, and past problems make the Molycorp expansion the most complex issue they've ever tackled.

Unfortunately, Molycorp is just one of many mines threatening desert ecosystems in Southern California. In fact, all three national parks in the region—Mojave, Death Valley and Joshua Tree—are currently struggling to manage mining claims within their jurisdiction. Mining in national parks might seem like a contradiction, but when parks have been created or expanded, existing claims have often remained valid. Recent estimates indicate there are about 1,500 mining claims in the three desert parks, most in MNP.

Many of these claims are currently dormant. But some may soon come to life. For example, in Death Valley claimants are pushing to open an underground talc mine. The operation, called Rainbow Talc, would be the first mine approved within National Park Service wilderness. Those mines already in operation within parks are often threatening park resources and in violation of federal and state regulations. The largest mining operation in MNP—Cima Cinder—has been operating without an approved plan of operations or a reclamation bond for post-closure cleanup. Regrettably, the lists goes on, but so do efforts to preserve precious areas in California's deserts. The Na



WILDLANDS

THE WILDLANDS PROJECT

UPDATE

In late February, around 35 people gathered in Davis for a grassroots workshop on scientific reserve design, public outreach, and implementation strategy. Groups and individuals working toward our ambitious vision learned from case studies, aired their own mapping approaches, strategized for group cooperation, and identified common goals for protecting wild lands and restoring big wilderness.

Working to close the gaps in California's conservation system for biodiversity, The Wildlands Project is drawing people and groups of diverse backgrounds together. Participants included conservation activists, ecologists, GIS specialists, wildlife biologists, and others with a common goal of securing California's biodiversity.

Organizations from four different bioregions agreed that sharing ideas and resources will make us more effective and create opportunities to link our proposals for a statewide campaign. CWC is organizing groups in unrepresented regions to complete the statewide team.

Designing a reserve network for all California native species and ecosystems is a monumental task. Some groups are trying to build support for their vision as the maps are developed. In these areas, much of the field work and mapping is planned from the bottom-up. Several groups are seeking involvement from land trusts, watershed restoration groups, landowners, ranchers, and others. Local citizens are collecting data, doing field work, and identifying important areas in their home area.

This process requires partnerships with non-traditional environmental supporters. Mapping our reserve networks with community support is a worthy goal, but some groups are timid about airing our vision in public because it will offend some people. This raises an important conflict that must be addressed.

Concern about a backlash is well-founded, yet courage has won many wilderness battles in the past. In 1995, a proposal by Greater Ecosystem Alliance for a scientifically-based reserve network in the North Cascades was met by fear and anger from the public and even by some environmental groups. What was a reasonable proposal for protecting the biodiversity of the North Cascades hit a wall of opposition and polarized the community before it was actually released.

On the other hand, boldly advocating for big wilderness has protected many precious places. If activists had waited for community consensus in the various battles to save redwood forests, they wouldn't have stopped logging anywhere on the North Coast. The activists who planned the wilderness campaign for the California desert had originally capped their proposal at three million acres, but when the bill was finally signed, the California Desert Protection Act added almost seven million acres into the Wilderness Preservation System.

The question hinges on how and when to present reserve network information. We must wisely consider political reality and timing. But this is a visionary movement—advocating for wilderness will always offend someone. We're currently fighting a phony consensus approach in the Quincy Library Group. Our task is to build enough support so we can boldly advocate for our reserve networks. We must not allow the zeal for consensus to distract us from The Wildlands Project vision.

Geiger counters buzzed when investigators checked the spill, which spewed enough radioactive debris to fill thirty 55-gallon drums.

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Wilderness Forum

Book Review

The Monkey's Bridge

Mysteries of Evolution in Central America

David Rains Wallace, Sierra Club Books, 288 pages, \$25, cloth, 1997

Most California environmentalists are familiar with the works of David Rains Wallace, having read his award-winning *The Klamath Knot*, the superb natural history of the greater Siskiyou region, or *The Turquoise Dragon*, an enchanting eco-thriller that takes the reader from the Bay Area to the Trinity Alps and Kalmiopsis wilderness areas. If you enjoyed these or a dozen of his other books, you will appreciate *The Monkey's Bridge*.

Wallace's latest natural history treatise looks at the region that linked North and South America some three million years ago and the amazing mix of flora and fauna that surged back and forth across this land bridge. His knack for bringing a region to life makes it a delight to learn about hundreds of species, volcanoes, plate tectonics, and gomphotheres.

But Wallace tells more of the story than just the natural history. He begins with the adventurers who sailed from Europe and conquered some, but definitely not all of the native peoples of Central America. Next are those trying to find a shortcut from the Atlantic to the Pacific, including the French attempt to build a canal at a cost of an estimated 22,000 lives. He then brings in the naturalists, from those who accompanied the first explorers to Charles Darwin and Alfred Russel Wallace.

Much of the story is embedded in geology. The fossil record in North and South America led evolutionists to recognize the importance of this land bridge, and the

revolutionary theory of plate tectonics gave us the mechanism to explain how the bridge formed.

But what really brings this book alive is that Wallace has been there, from his first three-month journey in 1971, a return in 1987 for a "gaudy bird-watching trip," and repeat visits during the last decade. He climbs the volcanoes, claws through the dense rain forests, and snorkels the coral reefs. "Big marine toads plopped in and out, acorn woodpeckers called 'Kraaaa! Kraaa' in the pines, and a flock of parakeets flew shrieking overhead," he colorfully writes.

As you surely can imagine, this is not a totally happy tale. Wallace discusses the "island ecology" theories of habitat fragmentation and loss of species. He mentions the recent extinction of the flightless, grebe-like poc and the golden toad and recounts the decline of the harpy eagle. But he also describes efforts to reverse this loss of habitat through programs like Paseo Pantera ("the path of the panther") that is a major element of The Wildlands Project's strategy to protect the biodiversity of the North American continent.

Wallace clearly is in awe of the complexity and diversity of the Central American rain forest. "Sometimes I think the human language, or simply human mentality, hasn't evolved yet to the point where tropical rain forest is comprehensible or describable," he writes.

But with *The Monkey's Bridge*, Wallace has made a great start.

—Jim Eaton

Peninsular bighorn sheep

Continued from page 1

of Rancho Mirage. That's our logo, the bighorn...I'm happy about [the listing], but I hope it won't have too many impacts on ongoing [development] projects. I have to think about the ramifications."

The Peninsular bighorn has been listed as threatened by the state of California since 1971, but this has not been enough to halt the species' decimation. If the federal listing has not come too late, it may provide the protection and help needed to save this magnificent endemic species.

Jane King is the Membership and Development Associate for CWC.



A Peninsular bighorn ram roams the foothills of the Southern California desert. Photo courtesy of the Bighorn Institute.

Molycorp mine expansion threatens Mojave National Preserve

Continued from page 6

tional Parks and Conservation Association is working with other organizations to protect land in and around the National Park System from the effects of mining. For more information, please contact our Pacific Regional office at (510) 839-9922.

Mitch Tobin interns as a policy analyst with the National Parks and Conservation Association and is a graduate student at U.C. Berkeley.



Calendar

April-May: New activist trainings and wilderness workshops for folks interested in the Shasta-Trinity, Inyo, and Mendocino national forests. Call Ryan Henson of CWC at (530) 335-3183 (or by e-mail at ryan@calwild.org) for dates and locations.

April 25-26: California Trails Day Weekend at the Cache Creek Wilderness Study Area. Activities include trail construction and trail maintenance. Call Scott Adams of the Bureau of Land Management at (707) 468-4000 for details.

May 16: Wildlands 2000 campaign meeting. Join activists from throughout the state as they lay the foundation for the next wilderness effort. See announcement on page two for more information.

May 29-31 National Wilderness Conference, Seattle, Washington. Join dozens of environmental organizations and hundreds of wilderness advocates as they inspire and equip each other to help secure lasting protection for the remaining unprotected wilderness in America. For more information and to place your name on the conference mailing list, send your name, mailing address, phone number and e-mail address to: wildcon@twsw.org, National Wilderness Conference 1998, 12730 9th Avenue NW, Seattle, Washington 98177-4306.

CWC T-shirts



Julissa wears our six-tone landscape shirt, available in jade, fuchsia, light blue, or pale green for \$15. Paul sports our three-color logo T-shirt, available in jade, royal blue, birch, or cream for \$15.

Not shown but still available: our animal design by Bay Area cartoonist Phil Frank, in beige or light gray, for \$12. All shirts are 100 percent double-knit cotton. To order, use the form on the back page.

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
 Citizens for Better Forestry; Hayfork
 Citizens for Mojave National Park; Barstow
 Citizens for a Vehicle Free Nipomo Dunes; Nipomo
 Committee to Save the Kings River; Fresno
 Conservation Call; Santa Rosa
 Davis Audubon Society; Davis
 Desert Protective Council; Palm Springs
 Desert Subcommittee, Sierra Club; San Diego
 Desert Survivors; Oakland
 Earth Justice Legal Defense Fund; S. F.
 Eastern Sierra Audubon Society; Bishop
 Ecology Center; Berkeley
 Ecology Center of Southern California; L. A.
 El Dorado Audubon Society; Long Beach
 Fresno Audubon Society; Fresno
 Friends of Chinquapin, Oakland
 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
 International Center for Earth Concerns; Ojai
 John Muir Project/Earth Island Institute; Pasadena
 Kaweah Flyfishers; Visalia
 Keep the Sespe Wild Committee; Ojai
 Kern Audubon Society; Bakersfield
 Kern River Valley Audubon Society; Bakersfield
 Klamath Forest Alliance; Etna
 League to Save Lake Tahoe; South Lake Tahoe
 LEGACY-The Landscape Connection; Arcata

Loma Prieta Chapter, Sierra Club; Palo Alto
 Los Angeles Audubon Society, West Hollywood
 Los Padres Chapter, Sierra Club
 Marble Mountain Audubon Society; Etna
 Marin Conservation League; San Rafael
 Mendocino Environmental Center; Ukiah
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 Mono Lake Committee; Lee Vining
 Mother Lode Chapter, Sierra Club; Sacramento
 Mt. Shasta Area Audubon Society; Mt. Shasta
 Mountain Lion Foundation; Sacramento
 Native Habitat; Woodside
 Natural Heritage Institute, San Francisco
 Natural Resources Defense Council; S.F.
 NCRCC Sierra Club; Santa Rosa
 Nordic Voice; Livermore
 Northcoast Environmental Center; Arcata

People for Nipomo Dunes Nat'l. Seashore; Nipomo
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 Planning & Conservation League; Sac.
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 The Red Mountain Association; Leggett
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 San Diego Chapter, Sierra Club; San Diego
 San Fernando Valley Audubon Society; Van Nuys
 Save Our Ancient Forest Ecology (SAFE); Modesto
 Sequoia Forest Alliance; Kernville
 Seven Generations Land Trust; Berkeley
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 Tulare County Audubon Society; Visalia
 Tule River Conservancy; Porterville
 U.C. Davis Environmental Law Society; Davis
 Ventana Wildlands Group; Santa Cruz
 Western Ancient Forest Campaign; Washington, D.C.
 Western States Endurance Run; S. F.
 The Wilderness Land Trust; Carbondale, CO
 The Wilderness Society; San Francisco
 Wintu Audubon Society; Redding
 Yahi Group, Sierra Club; Chico
 Yolano Group, Sierra Club; Davis
 Yolo Environmental Resource Center; Davis

"There's a lot of rhetoric being tossed around about recreation and riparian areas being so valued. I hear a lot of talk but I don't see the walk. While we're talking out of one side of our mouths, internally we're slam-dunking any biologist who speaks up... And that's basically why I left. I spoke up a few times too often."

—Jim Cooper, former Southwest Regional Fisheries Coordinator for the Forest Service, who, along with another veteran biologist, quit the agency in frustration.

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