

# WILDERNESS RECORD

News Journal of the California Wilderness Coalition

WINTER 2008



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**CALIFORNIA  
WILDERNESS  
COALITION**

*The Voice for Wild California*

**CENTRAL OFFICE**

1212 Broadway, Suite 1700  
Oakland, CA 94612  
(510) 451-1450  
info@calwild.org

**DESERT FIELD OFFICE**

167 North Third Avenue, Suite M  
Upland, CA 91786  
(909) 946-1855

**STAFF**

*Desert Program Director*  
**Monica Argandoña**

*Associate Director*  
**Meredith Eilers**

*Administrative Assistant*  
**Erika Garcia**

*Policy Director*  
**Ryan Henson**

*Desert Field Organizer*  
**Meghan Nicholson**

*GIS Coordinator*  
**Chieko Plotts**

*Operations Manager*  
**Meagan Rossi**

*Deputy Policy Director*  
**Brent Schoradt**

*Desert Field Organizer*  
**Laurel Williams**

*The California Wilderness Coalition protects the natural landscapes that make California unique, providing clean air and water, a home to wildlife, and a place for recreation and spiritual renewal.*

*CWC is the only organization dedicated to protecting and restoring California's wild places and native biodiversity on a statewide level.*

*Since 1976, we have empowered local communities and conservationists to be the voice for wild California.*



JIM ANDRE

**WILDERNESS RECORD**

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## A Message from CWC Board President, Don Morrill

Fall and early winter at the CWC offices found our policy team busy at work on a number of critical fronts. The staff has worked closely with Congresswoman Mary Bono (R-Palm Springs) to support her new wilderness bill for Riverside County, which nearly doubles the wilderness acreage she proposed last session.

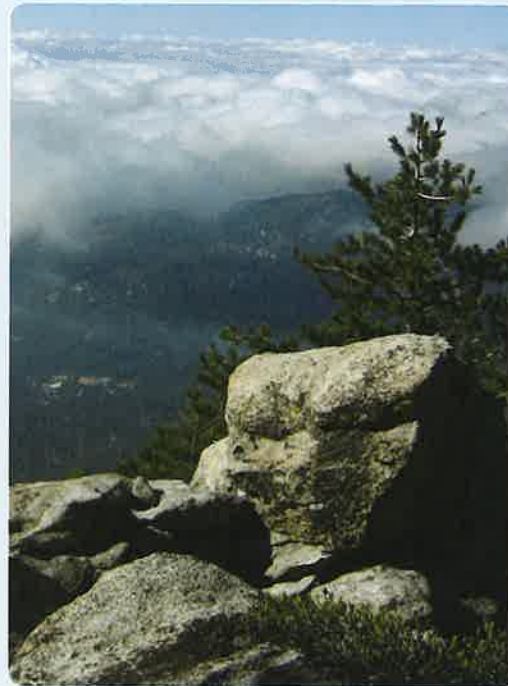
This November, Representative Bono's bill received a hearing before the House Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands. In preparation, CWC Policy Director Ryan Henson spent more than a week in Washington, DC providing an accurate flow of information to Congressional staff. It's astounding what misinformation comes to the Hill from ill-informed anti-wilderness advocates. Congress is fortunate to have Ryan and our policy team's support to set records straight about wilderness protection and its benefits to the public.

Deputy Policy Director Brent Schoradt is leading an effort to identify and describe the damage caused by off-road vehicles (ORVs) on our national forests' roadless lands. Brent is working to identify and protect hundreds of thousands of acres of our state land as wilderness. As always, other threats to our state's wild lands, such as proposed new power line corridors, continue to demand our vigilance and effort.

**Tahquitz Peak, San Jacinto National Monument Proposed Addition**

Desert Program Director Monica Argandoña is hard at work building our desert program. Our Desert Field Office recently moved from Riverside to Upland, in San Bernardino County, and we welcome a new team member, Meghan Nicholson. As our newest desert field organizer, Meghan joins us in our efforts to protect precious Southern California desert wild lands. We are excited to have a capable professional like Meghan on the team!

Our policy team proves that we can work together to protect wild California lands from numerous threats, whether it be false information or recreational vehicles. As our work continues, we maintain our intense search for an Executive Director to lead our team. To find out more about the position, please see our website at [www.calwild.org](http://www.calwild.org).



GEARY HUND

# Power Lines Threaten Southern California's Wild Places

This October, the Department of Energy designated the Southwest National Interest Electrical Transmission Corridor (NIETC). The corridor encompasses the entirety of Southern California and threatens to undermine years of conservation efforts to protect the California desert. As a result, Southern California's most beloved public lands, including the California Desert Conservation Area, could become subject to industrial-scale transmission lines.



DOUG STEAKLEY

The Department of Energy's designation was issued in response to the 2005 Energy Policy Act which called for the development of National Interest Electrical Transmission Corridors to increase transmission capacity in areas with high energy demand. Private and public lands within the Southwest NIETC corridor can now be subject to federal eminent domain for interstate transmission lines without regard for states' rights, or for protected places such as parkland, wilderness areas, historic areas, or conservation easements.

The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) can issue permits for the construction of new transmission lines anywhere within the National Interest Electric Transmission Corridor whenever a state has "withheld approval for more than 1 year." FERC has interpreted this provision to allow it to issue a permit even if the state has affirmatively denied the application within one year. Justified reasons for delay or denial — such as a state's efforts to increase energy efficiency, promote green technologies, comply with applicable state law, or protect publicly-owned natural resources — are irrelevant.

As a result, energy companies can now appeal to FERC to fast-track the construction of industrial-scale transmission corridors through Southern California's spectacular public lands. There is no protection for federally owned public lands from being crossed by transmission lines. Our most treasured places — places CWC has worked hard to protect, including wilderness areas, national parks, wild and scenic rivers, potential wilderness areas and the entire California Desert Conservation Area — are at risk. Furthermore, there are no limitations or even preferences for transmission projects that would connect renewable energy to the grid. On the contrary, there is nothing to prevent its extraordinary process from being used to advance coal-fired power, rather than renewable energy, and thus to contribute to increased generation of greenhouse gasses.

**Joshua Tree National Park**

**WHAT YOU CAN DO**

Conservationists from throughout the country have requested and received a re-hearing from the Department of Energy, but in the meantime the NIETC designation is now in effect and could cause irreparable harm to California's public lands. CWC is working with conservation partners to push for legislative and legal remedies that will protect wild places from future transmission lines. Join us in the fight to protect Southern California's irreplaceable public lands by writing to your elected officials.

• • •

**The Southwest National Interest Electrical Transmission Corridor encompasses nearly all of Southern California**

**Write Senator Feinstein** letting her know that areas in her beloved desert, that she worked so hard to protect, are being threatened.

**Senator Dianne Feinstein**

EMAIL <http://feinstein.senate.gov/>

PHONE (202) 224-3841 • FAX (202) 228-3954

**Write Governor Schwarzenegger** and **Attorney General Jerry Brown** and tell them that the Mid-Atlantic States are already acting with formal complaints and seeking reversals on the designations. Request that they do the same.

**Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger**

EMAIL <http://gov.ca.gov/interact>

PHONE (916) 445-2841 • FAX (916) 558-3180

**Attorney General Jerry Brown**

EMAIL <http://ag.ca.gov/contact>

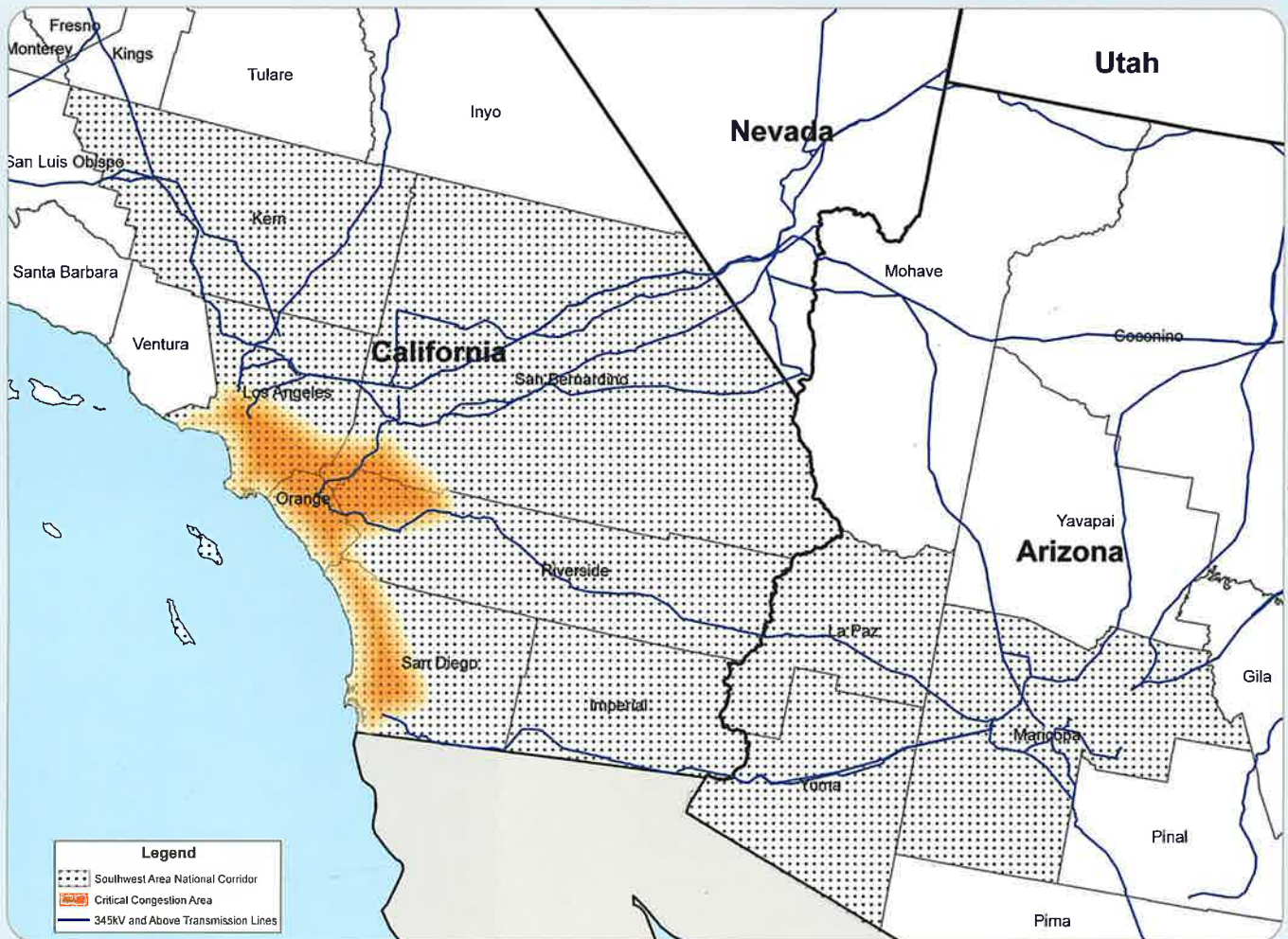
PHONE (800) 952-5225 • FAX (916) 323-5341

**Write Senator Boxer** to let her know that NIETC runs counter to forward thinking energy policy.

**Senator Barbara Boxer**

EMAIL <http://boxer.senate.gov/>

PHONE (202) 224-3553



# California Desert and Mountain Heritage Act Reaches Important Milestone

Representative Mary Bono's (R-Palm Springs) California Desert and Mountain Heritage Act (H.R. 3682) received a hearing before the House of Representatives' National Parks, Forests and Public Lands Subcommittee of the Natural Resources Committee on November 13, 2007. This may sound rather bureaucratic, but it is actually an exciting milestone in the effort to pass H.R. 3682 and save the beautiful dunes, canyons, peaks, chaparral thickets and oak woodlands the bill will protect if it becomes law.



JEN SCHMIDT

Representative Bono's bill proposes to protect over 194,000 acres (303 square miles) of land as wilderness, over 31 miles of stream as wild and scenic rivers and over 8,000 acres (12 square miles) as additions to the existing San Jacinto/Santa Rosa Mountains National Monument in her Riverside County-based 45th Congressional District. The affected acreage is in Joshua Tree National Park, San Bernardino National Forest, Cleveland National Forest and the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) Palm Springs-South Coast Field Office. Last year's version of the legislation proposed to protect 125,000 acres of land as wilderness, but this year Mrs. Bono worked with Senator Barbara Boxer (D-California), the CWC, and other groups to significantly expand the size of the bill by including several BLM desert wild areas in eastern Riverside County. Senator Boxer has an identical companion bill in the Senate (S. 2109).

In order for H.R. 3682 to pass, it has to make it through the House Natural Resources Committee. The first step in that process is for it to be heard by the National Parks, Forests and Public Lands Subcommittee. CWC and our partners in the Riverside County effort were therefore very excited when the bill was scheduled for this November hearing before the Subcommittee.

As a result of over a week of truly grueling preparation, the hearing went extremely well. In her statement, Representative Bono noted that her bill is a way to balance development and habitat protection given that Riverside is America's third fastest-growing county. Local conservationist Geary Hund made an excellent witness in support of the measure, and representatives of the National Park Service and BLM endorsed the bill.



DOUG STEAKLEY



CWC ARCHIVES

Unfortunately, the Forest Service witness made several negative remarks about the bill, most of which were factually incorrect. A witness from the Off-Road Business Association stated erroneously that roads and popular off-road vehicle routes will be closed. Thankfully, Subcommittee Chairman Raul Grijalva (D-Arizona) asked many excellent questions that undermined the false claims made by the Forest Service in particular. In addition, Subcommittee Member Lois Capps (D-Santa Barbara) asked Geary Hund some questions about fire management in the proposed wilderness areas that further undercut the Forest Service's assertions.

No vote was taken on the bill, but we hope to see it passed by the Subcommittee and sent on to the full Natural Resources Committee in the early part of 2008. Senator Boxer, who is currently leading the fight in the Senate against climate change, would like to see the measure pass the House of Representatives before she launches her effort in the Senate.

(FAR LEFT)  
South Fork San Jacinto Proposed Wilderness

(LEFT)  
Joshua Tree National Park Wilderness Addition

(RIGHT)  
North Fork San Jacinto Proposed Wild & Scenic River

## COALITION news

### Welcome Meghan!

Meghan Nicholson joined the CWC team this November as our newest Desert Field Organizer. Based out of the Upland office, Meghan will be focusing her work on off-road issues in Southern California. Originally from Menlo Park, California, Meghan is finishing her senior year at Cal Poly Pomona with a bachelor's degree in business administration. Her strong management skills, acquired in school and professionally, will be put to good use organizing desert communities, working to prevent off-road vehicle abuse, and building community relationships. Meghan enjoys photography and is looking forward to documenting the various sides of wild California.



### Our Desert Program Office Has Moved!

In late November, CWC's Desert Program moved from Riverside to a new office in Upland. Our new San Bernardino County location brings us closer to a number of the potential wilderness areas we're working on, and offers more space to our growing desert field staff. Desert Program Director Monica Argandoña, and Desert Field Organizers Laurel Williams and Meghan Nicholson are all working out of this office. Stop by and say hello!

#### California Wilderness Coalition: Desert Program

167 North Third Avenue, Suite M  
Upland, CA 91786

PHONE (909) 946-1855  
FAX (909) 946-2700

## Desert Beauty Inspires Students on a Visit to Malpais Mesa and Surprise Canyon

“Do you all know why you’re here? You’re all pawns...” Here, Tom Budlong, activist and CWC volunteer, paused for effect, and then grinned as he continued, “...in a great conspiracy to get more people out here!” Tom raised his arms, indicating the surrounding desert. The wind was blowing, and despite lingering clouds from a rare rain, the sun was shining. It was a glorious day in the Mojave Desert. The students looked confused for a second as the explanation sank in to their groggy, Saturday morning brains, then smiles spread around the circle.

First on the itinerary was a hike to a high point in the Malpais Mesa Wilderness to get a good view of the next mesa over—Conglomerate Mesa. Although Malpais Mesa enjoys full federal wilderness protection, its neighbor is completely vulnerable to mining and off-road vehicle abuse.

The students hiked cross country and ascended a 6,000 foot knob in Malpais Mesa Wilderness. There was no trail, and toward the top some scrambling on all fours was required. The view was well worth the effort. To the east rose the Panamint Mountains with Telescope Peak snow-dusted and rosy from the afternoon sun. To the northwest, the sun cast shadows on the majestic slopes of Conglomerate Mesa. After the ascent, the students huddled on top and ate a quick lunch before descending into the Joshua tree forest on the north side of the mesa.

TOM BUDLONG

LAUREL WILLIAMS

In early December, six students from several Southern California colleges and universities joined Tom and CWC Desert Field Organizer Laurel Williams on a journey into the California desert. The goal was to learn about and enjoy the desert in the best way possible: by hiking and camping in it. The plan was to spend two days in the desert and see two very different places. Malpais Mesa Wilderness is a high elevation desert where Joshua trees rule and unique geologic formations pique the curiosity of any aspiring geologist. In Surprise Canyon, unexpected springs feed lush riparian habitats.

View of Conglomerate Mesa from Malpais Mesa



Malpais Mesa



TOM BUDLONG

Paul Nakama, a student at Mt. San Antonio College, marveled at the Dr. Seuss-like figures of the trees. "Take my picture with this one!" He shouted and ran over to a particularly twisted Joshua. Paul was among more than one student on the trip who had never been hiking or camping before.

After the hike through Malpais Mesa, the students headed into the Panamint Valley to camp out at the opening of Surprise Canyon, on the edge of the wilderness. Although chilly wind gusts made setting up tents challenging, the students persevered. After camp was set up, everyone filled up with a warm and robust pasta dinner cooked up on the tailgate of Tom's Land Cruiser.

As the sun rose early the next morning, the group members drank hot coffee and chocolate and bundled up to explore Surprise Canyon. Tall riparian growth from the canyon's rare, year-round water flow crowded out the trail, and made hiking up the canyon a real bush-whacking adventure. Although there was hope of seeing the herd of bighorn sheep that frequent the canyon for water, the only wildlife spotted were birds and an expired burro. The burro had most likely been attacked by a mountain lion earlier in the week.



LAUREL WILLIAMS

The weekend provided students with a glimpse of the desert and the trip was a new and exciting experience for everyone present. Christie Burrows, a University of Redlands student, reflected on her hiking experience: "One of the most impressive things about Malpais Mesa is the overwhelming feeling you get when you walk through and among all of the yucca and Joshua trees; they seemingly embrace one another and dance as though they themselves are human. It offers a sense of humanity in the most natural of places even for people who do not think that they can find any bond with such seemingly vacant wilderness."

If you'd like to learn more about how you can experience and work to protect California's desert wilderness, particularly if you're a college or high school student in southern California, contact CWC Desert Field Organizer Laurel Williams at [williams@calwild.org](mailto:williams@calwild.org), or (909) 946-1855.

• • •

(ABOVE)

Pausing for a photo op on Malpais Mesa

# California State Senate Bill 742 will Reform State OHV Program

This October, Governor Schwarzenegger signed Senate Bill 742 to enact reforms to California's Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) Program. For the past three decades, California's Off-Highway Vehicle Program has provided OHV grants to manage off-road vehicle recreation on California's public lands. Revenue to the program comes primarily from the off-highway portion of the California state fuel tax. With the program set to expire on January 1, 2008, Senator Darrell Steinberg (D-Sacramento) authored Senate Bill 742 to extend the program for 10 years and increase funding to manage off-road vehicles on California's public lands.

While SB 742 is not perfect, the California Wilderness Coalition is pleased that the bill will ensure long-term funding for restoration and law enforcement while helping to protect California's roadless forests from off-road vehicle damage.

## Senate Bill 742 includes the following pro-conservation reforms:

- For the first time the OHV grants program will give additional consideration to operations and maintenance projects that provide access to non-motorized recreation. CWC will be working to make sure that OHV dollars are used to maintain the forest roads used by hikers, campers, and anglers instead of only going to all-terrain vehicle and motorcycle facilities.
- The state OHV Program will not fund new OHV trails or roads in Forest Service Inventoried Roadless Areas (roughly 4 million acres of potential wilderness). It states that routes or roads in roadless areas must be included in the "system" by January 1, 2009 in order to be funded. CWC will be taking all action necessary to stop any such routes from being designated.
- Law enforcement funding will be increased.
- Off-road vehicle riders will face increased fines for entering closed areas. Before SB 742, state law did not include such fines.
- Funding for restoration is protected and non-profit organizations are now allowed to apply directly for grants.
- Planning for restoration projects is an eligible expenditure for restoration projects.
- The California Wildlife Conservation Board will help develop and implement the restoration grants program.

(PHOTO, LEFT)  
Bigelow Sneezeweed, King Canyon National Park

(PHOTOS, RIGHT)  
Desolation Wilderness, Eldorado National Forest

## Role of the OHV Commission

Perhaps the most controversial aspects of SB 742 are provisions that remove the OHV grant approval authority from the Off-Highway Vehicle Motor Vehicle Recreation Commission and place that authority with the Director of State Parks. This portion of the bill was particularly tough for CWC to accept because the current OHMVR Commission has been a strong voice for conservation. The commissioners have shown immense leadership by funding restoration projects and jumpstarting route designation efforts for California's national forests. However, we still believe that Senate Bill 742 will prevent a return to the "bad old days," when anti-conservation commissioners directed grant funding to open up sensitive public lands to motorized vehicles. The bill clearly spells out funding levels for restoration and law enforcement and prevents future commissions from redirecting funds to other purposes.

CWC applauds the current OHMVR commissioners and thanks them for their work to protect California's public lands for future generations. In a perfect world, the current commissioners would continue to approve the state's OHV grants.



JIM ROSE

## Next Steps

Our work to make sure that off-road vehicles are managed to protect California's cherished public lands is just beginning. CWC will be working with conservationists and land management agencies throughout the state to make sure that OHV grants are used to sustainably manage off-road vehicle recreation on California's public lands. We will be encouraging agencies to decommission and restore unnecessary forest roads and better maintain the dirt roads used by hikers, backpackers, campers and anglers to reduce sedimentation and serve the non-motorized outdoor enthusiasts whose fuel taxes pay into the OHV Program.

• • •



JIM ROSE

# Take a Hike in the Malpais Mesa Wilderness!

*A suggestion from CWC's Desert Program Director, Monica Argandoña*

Malpais Mesa, with an elevation of 7,731 feet, is within the 32,360 acre Malpais Mesa Wilderness. The name "Malpais," which means "badlands" in Spanish, hints at the rugged nature of this wilderness of deep canyons, sheer mountainsides, and stacked basalt flows, evidence of its volcanic origins. A hike to the rim of the mesa takes the visitor through red and black volcanic rock, creosote, low desert shrubs, and grasses, with the chance to spot a mule deer or golden eagle. Those who make it to the top are rewarded with stunning views of Mount Whitney and an amazing Joshua tree forest.

**Maps:** Santa Rosa and Keeler 7.5 minute topos or Darwin Hills 1:100,000 scale topo.

**Directions:** From the junction of Highways 190 and 395 at Olancho, follow Highway 190 east. Turn right at the 190 and 136 junction, and continue ten miles east to a desert road (BLM Road S111) heading north. Follow this road, staying left at the fork, to the Santa Rosa Mine. You can park your car at the mine. From the Santa Rosa Mine, follow a bulldozed track above the mine and climb to the rim of the mesa. The

cross-country hike to the top of the mesa is approximately six miles round-trip with an elevation gain of 1300 feet.



Malpais Mesa

MONICA ARGANDOÑA

## CALIFORNIA WILDERNESS COALITION

1212 Broadway | Suite 1700 | Oakland | CA 94612

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MR. PHIL FARRELL

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