

WILDERNESS RECORD

News Journal of the California Wilderness Coalition

SPRING/SUMMER 2008



Yucca whipplei bloom in Joshua Tree National Park

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**CALIFORNIA
WILDERNESS
COALITION**

The Voice for Wild California

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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.



Desert Primrose

CWC ARCHIVES

WILDERNESS RECORD

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A Message from the Executive Director



This is my fifth week at CWC, and what has impressed me the most is the depth of knowledge, experience, and passion of our board, staff, and members in protecting wild California. Over the last 30-odd years, CWC has been at the forefront of every wilderness bill, and every campaign to protect the Golden State's wild public lands.

In the next pages, you will read about some of our recent successes—kudos to Representative Mary Bono Mack (R-CA) for introducing the California Desert and Mountain Heritage Act (H.R. 3682) which passed the House and will be sponsored in the Senate by Barbara Boxer (D-CA) and Diane Feinstein (D-CA). The bill will protect four new wilderness areas plus wilderness at Joshua Tree and Beauty Mountain – all in all more than 190,000 acres. We also applaud Representative Howard P. “Buck” McKeon (R-Santa Clarita) who along with Senator Boxer introduced the Eastern Sierra and Northern San Gabriel Wild Heritage Act which proposes nearly 500,000 acres of wilderness protections.

The ripples from CWC may start in a public meeting in Modoc County, but in short time they extend to Washington D.C. and back. When it comes to California's wild landscapes; CWC is the “go to” group. And that makes perfect sense. Our members, thousands who have supported CWC for decades, support us because we stay focused on our singular mission—being the voice for wild California. We haven't done it alone; brave and tenacious lawmakers, local citizens, grassroots groups and other environmental leaders have worked shoulder-to-shoulder with us. Lots of organizations do a terrific job protecting the environment, some nationwide. California Wilderness Coalition is the only group dedicated to protecting wilderness in the state. Our roots are here, and I think that's why we are effective. We know this land inside and out.

Barbara Hill is the Executive Director of CWC

• Introducing New Executive Director, Barbara Hill •

We are pleased to announce the appointment of Barbara Hill as Executive Director of CWC. Formerly vice-president of the California State Parks Foundation (CSPF), she launched CSPF's Permanent Protection of Parklands program which combines legislative action, policy development, and citizen advocacy to promote and protect California's state parks. She is also credited

with growing CSPF membership from 26,000 to more than 90,000. California's wild lands are facing multiple threats from poor management, expanding development, and climate change, and as a result CWC is focused on expanding our resources to meet those challenges. Our board and staff are delighted to have her join our team.

Protecting Southern California's Roadless Areas

On February 27, 2008 the California Wilderness Coalition (CWC) and other organizations concerned about California's public lands were called into California Resources Secretary Mike Chrisman's office in Sacramento for a secret meeting. After we sat down and introduced ourselves, Secretary Chrisman announced without any fanfare that Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger and California Attorney General Edmund G. Brown, Jr. would sue the U.S. Forest Service (USFS). The suite was to be delivered on the following day, with the intention to protect over a million acres of roadless areas in Southern California. Roadless areas are unprotected lands under the jurisdiction of the USFS that are often suitable for wilderness designation. Protecting roadless areas is a high priority for conservationists.

This dramatic announcement was preceded by months of frustration as conservationists and state officials battled the USFS over the issue of how to manage Southern California's roadless lands.

In September, 2005, the agency released new management plans for the Angeles, Cleveland, Los Padres, and San Bernardino National Forests. These plans allowed for road construction and other destructive activities in all but 8 percent (86,000 acres) of the roadless areas in the four forests. After a public outcry, Governor Schwarzenegger joined with CWC and other

groups in seeking to overturn the plans by filing an administrative appeal with the USFS. After the USFS denied the governor's appeal, state officials decided to sue.

Fortunately, President Clinton's Roadless Area Conservation Rule is currently in effect. This policy prohibits new road construction and certain other destructive activities in roadless areas. However, the rule is being challenged in the courts by anti-conservation interests, so it is imperative that destructive plans such as those approved for the four Southern California national forests be overturned.

The Southern California roadless areas represent 25 percent of all of the state's roadless areas and they contain most of the remaining open space, outdoor recreation opportunities, and wildlife habitat still available in southwestern California. As some of the last remaining refuges for the California condor, San Joaquin kit fox and hundreds of other plants and animals, state officials and conservationists consider it imperative that the four southern California forests and their roadless areas remain as wild as possible in the future.

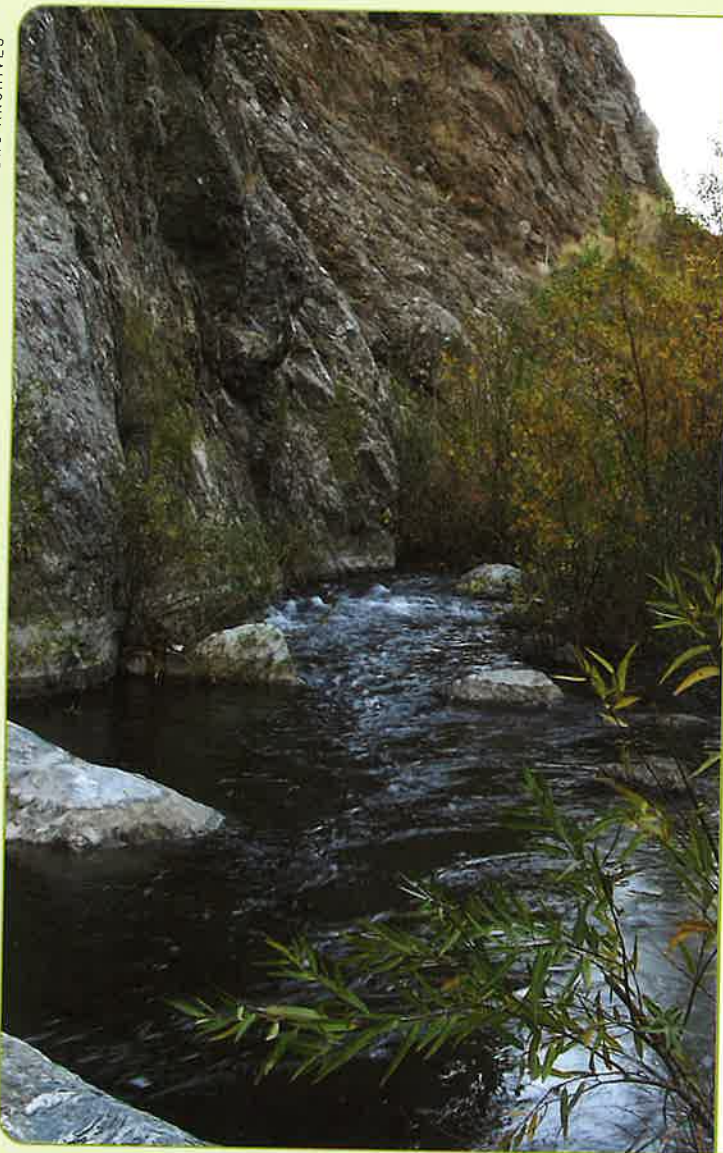


Introducing New Board President, Jim Dodson

These certainly are interesting times at the California Wilderness Coalition: A new Executive Director, a sudden spate of new wilderness proposals before us, and some changes in our Board of Directors. I have served on the Board for only a few years, but I remember well the creation of the California Wilderness Coalition. I live in Lancaster in the western Mojave Desert, and have worked on wilderness for many years.

I was one of the primary activists who designed and managed the California Desert Protection Act of 1994. I have a fair amount of experience outside of CWC, serving on the Board of the Sierra Club as well as a number of other roles in more local organizations.

I am looking forward to the next year as we undertake both some rebuilding and some new



Piru Creek in Los Padres
National Forest

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Please write **Governor Schwarzenegger** and **Attorney General Brown** to thank them for suing the U.S. Forest Service over its failure to protect roadless areas in the Angeles, Cleveland, Los Padres, and San Bernardino National Forests. You may want to note that these wild lands are essential for the continued survival of hundreds of species of plants and wildlife, including the California condor, and that they provide unparalleled recreation opportunities and scenic vistas that greatly contribute to the quality of life we enjoy in California.

You can reach these officials at:

The Honorable Arnold Schwarzenegger

State Capitol
Sacramento, CA 95814
PHONE (916) 445-2841
FAX (916) 445-4633

Attorney General Edmund G. Brown, Jr.

California Department of Justice
Attn: Public Inquiry Unit
P.O. Box 944255
Sacramento, CA 94244-2550
PHONE (916) 322-3360
TOLL-FREE IN CA 1-800-952-5225
FAX (916) 323-5341

construction of our organization. We are looking for some fresh faces for our Board, and we need to increase our stability and independence. You will be seeing both new faces and new commitments from us, but our work remains as always, serving as "the Voice for Wild California," and I encourage all of you to join in where you can.

• • •

*"The idea of wilderness
needs no defense.
It only needs more defenders."*

— JOHN MUIR —

Eldorado National Forest Designates Off-Road Vehicle Routes

Thanks to Karen Shambach of Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER) for contributing to this article



The Eldorado National Forest is the first forest in California to complete the statewide national forest off-road vehicle (ORV) route designation process. On March 31, 2008 the US Forest Service issued a final decision to officially designate 1,847 miles of motorized roads out of more than 2,800 miles of unauthorized and currently existing routes and roads in the Eldorado National Forest.

Limiting vehicles to officially designated routes will end three decades of unmanaged off-road vehicle recreation. This negligence has increased soil compaction and erosion, increased stream sedimentation, reduced water quality, spread noxious weeds, increased fire risk, damaged cultural resources, and increased disturbance levels to sensitive wildlife. Unfortunately, the new plan would legalize numerous problem routes and may not go far enough to protect forest resources and traditional outdoor recreation enjoyed by the majority of forest users.

The Eldorado National Forest provides clean drinking water, a home for fish and wildlife, and outdoor recreational activities such as hiking, biking, fishing, and camping for millions in the greater Sacramento-Tahoe region. These irreplaceable assets are rapidly being degraded by off-road machines, such as ATVs and dirt bikes. Off-road vehicles increase in number, power, and forest-intrusion range with each passing year.

Off-road vehicle users are a small minority of national forest users, and the Forest Service estimates that 93 percent of forest visitors nationwide do not use ORVs at all. Nevertheless, they have a disproportionately large "footprint" as they cause often irreparable damage to soil, streams, and trails, pollution, and noise that disrupts wildlife and traditional outdoor recreation.

Feather Falls

What's good about this route plan?

- Caples Creek proposed wilderness will be free of motorized vehicle routes.
- The final designations do not increase motorized trails in inventoried roadless areas.
- Vehicles will be limited to designated routes (this is being required nationally).
- Parking will be allowed only one vehicle length from the road.

What's wrong with the plan?

- Most watersheds would have a high density of roads and ORV trails, polluting water supplies and disrupting wildlife habitat and outdoor recreation.
- Miles of ORV trails are designated in sensitive meadows ecosystems.
- Wet-season closures from January to March are based on extreme drought years, not normal precipitation – closures are too short to protect roads, trails and streams in normal years.
- Motorcycles would be legalized on the most popular hiking trail in the Georgetown Ranger District: Hunter's Trail in the Rubicon River Canyon. This is a violation of the direction the Forest Service received to minimize conflicts with non-motorized forest users.

Eldorado National Forest officials are treating one mile as sufficient distance to provide 'quiet recreation' despite the fact that the Forest Service's own studies show dirt bikes can be heard for more than one mile.

...

TAKE ACTION!

WRITE TO THE FOREST SERVICE AT:

Eldorado National Forest
Supervisor's Office

100 Forni Road / Placerville, CA 95667
PHONE (530) 622-5061

COALITION news

A Call for Volunteers in the California Desert

We need your help! CWC is working to grow and expand our network of support by raising awareness about how important it is to protect California's last remaining wild deserts. If you live in or near the desert and are interested in leading hikes, hosting a "wilderness" party at your home, or have a creative idea to motivate your community, we want to hear from you!

Please contact Laurel Williams, CWC Desert Field Organizer:

lwilliams@calwild.org or (909) 946-1855

4th Annual Wilderness Round-Up a Success

During the last weekend in May more than fifty people gathered at Mt. San Jacinto State Park in Idyllwild for a weekend of hiking, camping, and connecting. In attendance were a mix of long-time wilderness activists, volunteers, and enthusiasts new to the wilderness movement. Throughout the weekend, round-up participants were presented with opportunities to get acquainted with local wilderness areas and wild and scenic rivers proposed in the California Desert and Mountain Heritage Act, a local wilderness bill currently moving through Congress.

Several hikes went out during the weekend to places such as South Fork of the San Jacinto, Tahquitz Peak, North Fork of the San Jacinto, and Beauty Mountain. Hikers even had the opportunity to travel up Cahuilla Mountain alongside a llama!

Evening campfires provided opportunities to catch up with old friends, to connect with new volunteers, and to explore wilderness efforts statewide. Saturday night campers were treated to a special presentation by Lee Stetson of John Muir Presentations. With Lee as John Muir and Alan Sutterfield as Theodore Roosevelt, the two presented an excerpt of their production, "The Tramp and the Roughrider." The entire audience was captivated as they watched John Muir and Theodore Roosevelt describe their views on hunting, animal rights, and forest management. In the words of Roosevelt, it was "bully good"!

If you missed out on this year's round-up, many of the hikes offered throughout the weekend will be presented again during the coming months. Please contact Laurel at lwilliams@calwild.org for information on upcoming hikes or visit www.desertmountainwild.org for the latest information on the California Desert and Mountain Heritage Act.

CWC extends our deepest thanks to everyone who helped make this a great weekend.

Sunrise Powerlink Proposes to Enter Wilderness

The great ecological transition zone between the deserts of eastern San Diego, western Imperial County, and the coastal sage scrub of central San Diego County is one of the most biologically diverse and scenic areas in California. The steady growth of cities and suburbs in the region has resulted in significant wildlife habitat loss. The federal, state, and local public lands in San Diego are more important than ever before in maintaining biodiversity. These lands are a refuge for sensitive plant and wildlife species, and for maintaining the quality of life for the area's



BRYN JONES



Desert Sunflowers



residents. Given the ecological and social importance of the region's natural places, it is no surprise that it has an exceptional array of designated federal and state wilderness areas, Bureau of Land Management (BLM) wilderness study areas, United States Forest Service (USFS) inventoried roadless areas, and citizen-proposed wilderness areas. Other ecologically and socially important areas include state parks and areas managed for non-motorized recreation by the BLM and USFS.

Unfortunately, these critical areas are at risk. San Diego Gas and Electric Company's proposal to violate the boundary of a designated state wilderness within Anza-Borrego Desert State Park in order to build a powerline is unprecedented and would have far-reaching implications. Thankfully, the Draft Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement (EIR/EIS), unlike the project's proponents, honestly acknowledges that "The loss of land in wilderness areas would be a significant and immitigable impact." The report continues to say that "the Proposed Project in the Anza-Borrego Link would have 35 significant and immitigable impacts" including negative effects on the flat-tailed horned lizard, the Peninsular bighorn sheep, the golden eagle, the quino checkerspot butterfly, and the barefooted banded gecko. The Draft EIR/EIS also recognized that the "Proposed Project as a whole would have 50 significant and immitigable impacts in one or more geographic areas for: biological resources, visual resources, wilderness and recreation, agricultural resources, cultural and paleontological resources, noise, air quality, socioeconomics, public services and utilities, and fire and fuels management" These ecological impacts are severe and there is an urgent need to block the Sunrise Powerlink project.



CWC submitted comments on the proposal stating our strong opposition to any alternative that would cross through one or more of the following important natural areas:

- *Agua Caliente State Wilderness*
- *Carrizo Canyon State Wilderness*
- *Coyote Mountains Wilderness*
- *Desert Oasis State Wilderness*
- *Eagle Peak Proposed Wilderness*
(a citizen-proposed wilderness included in Senator Barbara Boxer's S. 493)
- *Fish Creek Wilderness*
- *Granite Mountain State Wilderness*
- *Grapevine Mountain State Wilderness*
- *Grapevine Mountain State Wilderness*
- *Hauser South Inventoried Roadless Area*
- *Pinyon Ridge State Wilderness*
- *Pinyon Ridge State Wilderness*
- *San Felipe Hills WSA*
- *Santa Rosa Mountains State Wilderness*
- *Sawtooth Mountains A WSA*
- *Sawtooth Mountains Wilderness*
- *Sheep Canyon State Wilderness*
- *Sin Nombre State Wilderness*
- *Sombrero Peak State Wilderness*
- *Vallecito Mountains State Wilderness*
- *Vallecito Mountains State Wilderness*
- *Whale Peak State Wilderness*
- *Wil-yee State Wilderness*

In addition, we encouraged the California Public Utilities Commission and BLM to go a step further and select the No Project/No Action Alternative for the proposed project. Check your mailboxes for the most recent letter we sent out, which describes the impacts of this power project in detail.

Conference for Off-Road Vehicle Management

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On Saturday April 5, 2008, members of local communities gathered at the Joshua Tree Community Center for the Desert Protection Summit Forum. Working together, desert residents and public officials addressed the issue of destructive and illegal off-road vehicle (ORV) use and discussed possible strategies for solutions.

Organized by Alliance for Responsible Recreation (ARR) with support from CWC, Desert Protective Council, and Community ORV Watch, the forum was cosponsored by a number of local, regional, and national organizations including Friends of Juniper Flats, California Native Plant Society, and Defenders of Wildlife. The event was designed to provide a space for local private property owners and conservationists to voice their concerns to a panel of activists and public officials. The panel of officials included representatives from the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department, San Bernardino Code Enforcement, and the Bureau of Land Management, as well as the San Bernardino County District Attorney, and the Deputy Director of the State Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation (OHMVR) Division.

Joshua Tree National Park

As members of the panel and guest speakers discussed off-roading as a recreational sport, the consensus was that off-roading should not be eliminated from our open areas, but it does need to be properly managed.

CWC will work with the members of ARR as well as other community, state and federal stakeholders to advance long-term successful measures to prevent damaging, illegal ORV activity. CWC is focused on promoting better enforcement for local, state and federal agencies struggling to address the issue. We'll also be working statewide to promote restoration projects for streams, wetlands, and sensitive habitats damaged by illegal off-road activity.

For more information on getting involved to stop ORV damage in the desert, please contact Meghan Nicholson at mnicholson@calwild.org. For more information on our statewide efforts, go to our website calwild.org.



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California State Assembly Passes State Wilderness Legislation

The California State Assembly has passed two wilderness bills that together will designate new state wilderness areas, improve wilderness management and lead to wilderness suitability assessments for state-owned lands located within and adjacent to recently designated federal wilderness.

JIM ROSE



CWC ARCHIVES



Assemblymember John Laird (D-Santa Cruz) is authoring Assembly Bill 2945 which would allow state agencies to manage state wilderness areas using the 'minimum tool' necessary to preserve wilderness values. CWC is working with conservationists, state agencies and other stakeholders to make sure the bill also designates new wilderness on portions of high value state parks lands such as Castle Crags State Park, Andrew Molera State Park, Limekiln State Park and Providence Mountains State Recreation Area. If the bill is adopted it would legislatively designate new state wilderness for the first time since the passage of the 1974 California Wilderness Act and allow state wilderness to be managed on par with the 'minimum tools' guidelines used by federal wilderness managers. The bill was passed by the State Assembly on May 15th by a vote of 65 to 7 and will be heard in the Senate Natural Resources Committee on June 24th.

Assemblymember Noreen Evans (D-Napa) is authoring Assembly Bill 2923 which requests the Secretary of Resources and the State Lands Commission to review state-owned roadless areas for wilderness suitability and make recommendations to the state legislature. The bill prioritizes wilderness assessments for state-owned roadless lands including thousands of acres of state-owned roadless lands located within or adjacent to recently designated federal wilderness areas. The bill passed the State Assembly on May 27th by a vote of 54 to 24. Both bills must be passed out of the State Senate by August 31st.

CWC is pleased to see the legislature's renewed interest in state wilderness and is working to ensure the enactment of both bills.



Spring wildflowers in the Yuki Potential Wilderness

Take a hike in the South Fork San Jacinto Proposed Wilderness!

A suggestion from CWC's Desert Field Organizer, Laurel Williams

The **South Fork San Jacinto** Proposed Wilderness contains lush groves of big-cone Douglas fir, willow, and cottonwood. The rich streamside woodlands are a beautiful hiking destination, and home to mountain lions, mule deer, mountain quail, southern spotted owls, and bald eagles. This scenic jewel is proposed for wilderness designation in the California Desert and Mountain Heritage Act introduced by Representative Mary Bono Mack and Senator Barbara Boxer. The bill recently had a positive hearing in the Senate and CWC staff is working hard with our coalition members toward a passage of the bill (visit www.desertmountainwild.org for more details).

Maps: The moderate to strenuous hike on the South Fork Trail begins off of Highway 74. A brief climb takes you into the adjacent valley where the trail meanders along the valley wall, rising to an elevation of 4,200 feet with lovely views of Mt. Baldy before dropping to a pleasant shady spot along the South Fork of the San Jacinto River below. Stop here for a 2.5 mile (one way) hike, or continue on across the log "bridge" and follow the trail 2 more miles as it ascends the opposing valley wall to reach the Rouse Ridge route at an elevation of 4,600 feet (4.5 miles one way).

Directions: From the junction of HWY 111 and CA-74 in Palm Desert, take CA-74 west for 30 miles. End at the large turnout with Cal Trans cinder bins on the left. Take trail number 2E17.



LAUREL WILLIAMS

View from one of the peaks

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