



# WORDS OF *the* WILD

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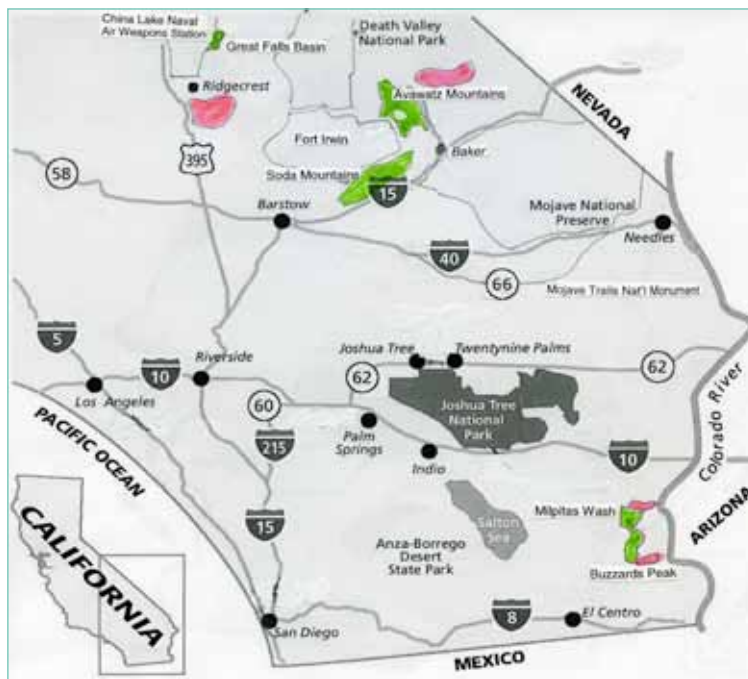
Newsletter of the Sierra Club's California/Nevada Wilderness Committee

## New Desert Wilderness comes to California — five new areas *Avawatz, Soda Mountains, Great Falls Basin, Buzzards Peak, Milpitas Wash*

On March 12, when the president signed S. 47--officially named the John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act--into law, he immediately added five new wilderness areas to California's previous 149—giving our state 154 wilderness areas—far more than any other state. (Next in number is Arizona, with 90, and then Nevada with 70.) We may have the highest number, but we stand respectfully behind Alaska in amount of Wilderness. Alaska's 48 areas do tend to be—well, just a trifle--larger on average than California's; Alaska contains close to half of all the designated wilderness in the U.S.

Here's info on the five new wilderness areas, roughly from north to south:

**Great Falls Basin Wilderness** of 7,810 acres is just west of Trona, in Inyo County. A perennial spring supplies the water that flows through a short distance in the Great Falls Basin and has cut a narrow, deep slot in the bedrock forming several falls. The steep mountainous terrain



5 new BLM wildernesses shown in green; main new BLM wilderness additions in pink (but not identified by name). Map for location only: NOT for precise shape or size of new protected areas; NPS wilderness or new NPS areas not shown.

includes granite outcrops which invite cross country wandering. Elevations range from 2,000 to 4,500 feet. Creosote dominates the mixed desert scrub vegetation which changes in the higher elevations to heavier upland scrub with yucca, mountain mahogany, and some pinyon and juniper trees. The Inyo brown towhee, a state-listed rare bird, frequents the basin, as do desert bighorn sheep. Year-round water creates an unusual refreshing hideaway in this often hot desert.

### **Avawatz Mountains Wilderness (89,500 acres).**

Rising to more than 6,100 feet above the Silurian Valley, the

Avawatz Mountains just west of Baker, north of the Mojave National Preserve, comprise colorful eroded slopes, rugged ridges, and steep, narrow canyons. With its diverse geology, the Avawatz Mountains Wilderness is a paradise for cross-country hikers and equestrians willing to brave harsh conditions and carry plenty of water to achieve solitude and an outstanding backcountry experience. The name "Avawatz" is derived from a Mohave Indian term meaning "red rock." Members of the Shoshone Nation continue to visit the area for spiritual

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# New Alabama Hills National Scenic Area

A less-known protection in the California Desert Protection Act of 2019

-- by Jora Fogg

The new California Desert Protection Act (CDPA) was signed into law on March 12, 2019, as part of the massive public lands omnibus bill S 47, formally entitled the John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act. It is the most significant land conservation law in the State since 2009 and is a rare example of successful bipartisan legislation.

photo: Bob Wick/BLM



Alabama Hills -- below Lone Pine Peak--a fine place for family recreation

and the first under the Bureau of Land Management's National Landscape Conservation System. BLM's previous NSA in California was the East Mojave National Scenic Area, which became the Mojave National Preserve under the 1994 Desert Protection Act.

(Don't confuse this latest CDPA with the original California Desert Protection Act of 1994, also championed by Senator Feinstein.)

'National' was a key descriptor for the Alabama Hills area because it is both

Aside from additional Wilderness for California's vast Desert, (see article pp. 1 and 3) the CDPA established the 18,610-acre Alabama Hills National Scenic Area (NSA) in the Owens Valley on the east side of the Sierra Nevada. One of the lesser-known designations of the Act, the new Alabama Hills NSA will "conserve, protect, and enhance for the benefit, use, and enjoyment of present and future generations the nationally significant scenic, cultural, geological, educational, biological, historical, recreational, cinematographic, and scientific resources of the Scenic Area."

Existing uses such as vehicle use, commercial filming, hunting, climbing,

and rock hounding will be preserved. In addition, as a part of this Act there will be a corresponding land transfer between the Inyo National Forest, BLM and the local Lone Pine Paiute - Shoshone Reservation of 132 acres of culturally sensitive land, a portion of which will be within the NSA.

The Alabama Hills Stewardship Group (AHS) -- a community-based partnership to maintain the area's landscape integrity and vital tourism economy-- spent 18 months gathering input from 30 stakeholder and 40 user groups concerning the future of the Alabama Hills. Once a decision to pursue a federal designation was made, an additional nine months was spent determining the designation's boundary and the appropriate federal designation that would preserve the dramatic scenic nature of the land with minimal infrastructure.

## What is a National Scenic Area?

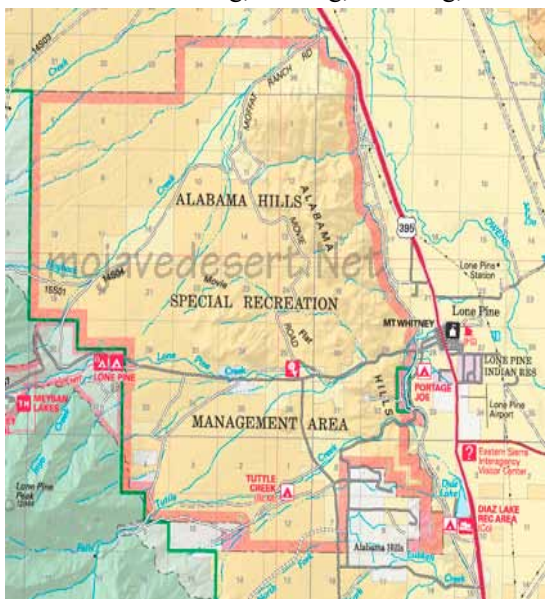
National Scenic Areas are federally designated areas of outstanding natural and scenic value that receive a level of protection centered around a blending of conservation and recreation. The nation's first NSA was California's Mono Basin National Forest Scenic Area designated in 1984. Generally NSAs are not suitable for wilderness designation and offer a wide range of recreational uses. The Alabama Hills will be the tenth NSA,

a national geologic treasure and nationally prominent historically. The area has significant national history implications from Paiute -- Shoshone habitation for thousands of years and the culturally sensitive and significant Native American sites, artifacts, and history there; and also from the more modern historic gold mines of the Alabama Hills. It was miners in the 1860s who named the area after the CSS Alabama, a Confederate warship. And, the spectacular rock outcroppings--with their back drop of the Sierra Nevada mountain crest--gave birth to the 'American Western' film genre, with more than 400 Hollywood films made here from "The Lone Ranger" and "Hopalong Cassidy" serials to "How the West was Won" and more recently "Ironman" feature length movies.

The area has nationally significant scenic features:

- a) The incredible jaw-dropping viewscape that is formed by the wind and water erosion of unique 90 million year old granitic boulders and hundreds of natural arches that dominate the area. Hundreds of thousands of visitors annually are drawn to this very unusual and visually stunning landscape;
- b) the scenic beauty has attracted legendary landscape photographers - like Edward

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Location of previous BLM Alabama Hills Recreation Area, now mostly legislated as the new NSA



photo: Jora Fogg



Fantastic Alabama Hills rock formations make for outstanding recreation as well as geologic study

Weston, Ansel Adams, and David Muench--to the Alabama Hills; and led to hundreds of films, print ads and commercials, that capture this magical landscape for the viewer; c) spectacular spring wildflower blooms, which serve as a colorful contrast to the stark background of the desert and rocks.

Friends of the Inyo, a regional public lands advocacy group, has been a critical local partner in this legislative journey, beginning with the AHSG founding board member and current secretary for the FOI, Mike Prather. Mike wrote the initial legislation before handing it off to federal legislators, with most of his initial draft making it into the final legislation. The designation, and subsequent implementation will prompt the development of a long-awaited management plan to address the increased recreational use the area is experiencing. The management plan intends to be citizen driven with guidance from the local community to create a clear vision for the Alabama Hills into the future. ~

Jora Fogg is Policy Director on the staff of Friends of the Inyo.

and cultural purposes, collecting plants and other materials for crafts and medicines.

The scenic **Soda Mountains Wilderness** is approximately 80,090 acres, located just north of Interstate 15, west of Baker. Two intermittent lakes, East Cronese and West Cronese, provide habitat for wintering and migrating waterfowl and shorebirds, including the endangered Yuma clapper rail. It is

also a choice area for raptors. Desert bighorn sheep live in the range, and the southern portion is home to the endangered desert tortoise. Historic use of the Soda Mountains Wilderness by Native Americans can be seen today in anthropomorphic figures, portions of aboriginal trail systems, and ancient salt and hunting camp locations. The Soda Mountains offer hikers ready access to multicolored canyons with steep, rocky walls.

The 17,250-acre **Milpitas Wash Wilderness** is near the southern end of the Mule Mountains and the Opal Hill Mine in Imperial County. The landscape, south of the McCoy Mountains and just west of the Colorado River is mainly desert mountain foothills as well as wash and floodplain. Petrified palm roots show this was once an ancient, lush landscape. Desert tortoise, mountain lion, long-eared owl, leaf nose bat, Merriam and desert kangaroo rat, long tail and little pocket mice, Bullock's and hooded orioles, towhees, white-crowned sparrow, Brewer's sparrow, warbler, black-headed grosbeak, diamondback rattler, and the endangered Gila woodpecker all find habitat here. The region supports the largest Sonoran Desert woodland in North America with many trees standing over 15 feet high, giving the area a lush character unusual for the desert. Most of the trees are legumes: mesquite, acacia, palo verde, ironwood, and also desert willow.

**Buzzards Peak Wilderness** in Imperial County has a total of 11,840 acres. The geologically rich soils of the Buzzards Peak Wilderness create landscapes of rich chocolate brown, yellows, reds, and blues. This is an important part of the traditional homeland of the Quechan tribe, containing ancient trails, intaglios, rock alignments, sleeping circles, lithic scatter, and other evidence of the tribe's history here. Wildlife and plants found here include cholla and beavertail cactus, ocotillo, palo verde,

acacia, ironwood, the rare California ditaxis, desert tortoise, Yuma king snake, Colorado River toad, Great Plains toad, tree lizard, burros, mule deer and mountain lion. The area was omitted from wilderness in 1994 due to interspersed private lands—but these have now mostly been purchased and added to Bureau of Land Management public lands.

The bill also expanded four wilderness areas managed by Bureau of Land Management, (Golden Valley, Kingston Range, Palo Verde Mountains, and Indian Pass Mountains) and added to National Park Service Wilderness in Death Valley National Park, as well as to the San Geronio Mountains Wilderness in San Bernardino National Forest.

In addition, Death Valley National Park was enlarged by 28,923 acres of BLM land in San Bernardino County, the narrow strip between the former southern border of the park and the Fort Irwin Military Reservation, north of Barstow. And Joshua Tree National Park grew bigger by some 4500 acres—mainly land formerly held by Southern California Edison Company.

A disadvantage of the current legislation related to wilderness was the “release” from former Wilderness Study status of several wild desert areas. Especially disappointing was release of the Cady Mountains area, west of the Mojave National Preserve, which had been proposed in 1994 but was omitted at the last minute. It deserved then and still fully deserves wilderness status. True, it is within the Mojave Trails National Monument – but that is far from having the strong legal protection from disruptive development that wilderness has. Other releases included portions of the Soda Mountains, Great Falls Basin, and Avawatz Mountains not designated as wilderness, as well as proposed additions to the Kingston Range Wilderness, and some proposed additions to Death Valley Wilderness not so designated.

Truly, California's magnificent desert, fully a quarter of our state, holds some of our most valuable public lands, and increased preservation is always welcomed for these once-overlooked lands--now finally recognized for recreation and wildlife habitat ~

# Restoring Fire for Cultural and Ecological Benefits

-- by Pamela Flick and Jared Dahl Aldern, PhD

Over countless centuries, fire has been among the most important processes shaping ecological communities in California. Our coniferous forest, oak woodland, open shrubland, and grassland ecosystems each evolved their own distinctive fire regimes with varying fire frequencies, intensities, patterns, seasons, sizes, and severities. These historical fire regimes revitalized wildlife habitat, raised groundwater levels, sustained surface water quality, and nourished the soil. Mixed-severity fires leave a mosaic of effects, including some patches burned at high severity and relatively cool burns in other areas. By thinning dense thickets of trees and shrubs, these patchy fires could help to limit damage from subsequent large, out-of-control, wind-driven wildfires.

Beneficial fires can start naturally with a lightning strike, like the Lions Fire that the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) managed for ecological benefit in the Ansel Adams Wilderness this past summer. Good fires can also be prescribed and intentionally ignited, as Indigenous people have done throughout most of California for millennia. Over time, the historical

fire regime has produced and sustained many fire-dependent plant species, such as giant sequoias, and entire fire-adapted ecosystems like the coniferous forests of the Sierra Nevada.

More recently, we've experienced overly severe, extensive fires that have destroyed habitats, eroded hillsides, filled streams with sediment, and displaced native plants with exotic, invasive species. In twentieth-century California, aggressive fire suppression policies (supported by public fire prevention campaigns that featured characters like Smokey the Bear) combined, paradoxically, with the increased accidental ignitions caused by an exploding human population to disrupt historical fire regimes throughout the state. From north to south, California's ecosystems now suffer from an excess of randomly ignited fires like the Carr, Camp, and Thomas fires and a deficit of thoughtfully designed and prescribed or managed fires. In the Sierra Nevada, many areas that historically had burned every dozen years or so experienced no fire at all over the course of the last century or more. As a result, forests that would have otherwise been regularly cleared by fire have become dense and dangerously overstocked with shrubs and small-to-medium sized trees. This vegetation acts as ladders that can carry fire up into the tree canopy, causing high-intensity crown fires and leading to significant mortality of trees.

Indigenous people have employed fire since time immemorial to sustain ecosystems and their interconnected plant and animal communities. In the past, these prescribed, cultural or ecological burns took place in widespread locations, including areas now designated as wilderness. Benefits from such burns may include that they:

- clear shrubs from an area to facilitate travel, make the movements of people and animals more visible, and make food resources more accessible to both people and wildlife.
- drive or attract game.
- increase the diversity and production of bulbs, tubers, fruits, and seeds (such as manzanita berries and

acorns), thus sustaining the food web for a diverse set of animals, including deer, bear, and smaller animals that, in turn, may be prey for rare predator species such as spotted owls and Pacific fishers.

- maintain firebreaks, reduce fuel levels, and lessen the extent of intense, severe wildfires.
- reduce insect pests and plant parasites.
- sustain meadows, water storage, surface water, spring flow, and stream flow.

Today, restoration of a fire regime of repeated, expertly timed burns of varying extent and intensity, conducted by knowledgeable practitioners, could support whole suites of cultural and ecological resources. The good news is that there is growing understanding and agreement that in order to increase resiliency, gain ecological and cultural benefits, and reduce potential for devastating damage from future wildfires, we must restore fire to our fire-adapted ecosystems when and where it is safe to do so.

However, challenges remain in getting more fire on the ground. Barriers to restoring fire include but are not limited to lack of funding and personnel capacity, air quality and public health impacts from smoke emissions, and the discounting of local and Indigenous ecological knowledge.

Together, varied stakeholders are working to burn through these barriers. The State Legislature last year bolstered state investments for fuels reduction and prescribed fire use by \$1 billion, to increase the focus on wildfire hazard planning for human communities, among other positive fire-related outcomes. Understanding is increasing of trade-offs between uncontrolled wildfire smoke outputs and emissions from controlled, prescribed fire done at the right time, in the right place, and under the right conditions, and interest is growing in working with the right people — including expert Indigenous practitioners — who can help ensure that prescribed burns -- *continued page 5*



Smoke-filled skies and signs like this one in the Mountain Home Demonstration State Forest in the Southern Sierra are becoming more common as proactive burning efforts increase to reduce hazardous fuels in overgrown forests.



## Restoring Fire

-- from page 4

burns achieve both ecological and cultural goals

In fact, collaborative efforts are key to expanding the use of fire. The Dinkey Landscape Restoration Project on the western slope of the southern

Sierra was one of the first projects approved a decade ago under the federal Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program. The “Dinkey Collaborative” brings together timber industry representatives, off-road vehicle enthusiasts, environmentalists, local landowners, tribes, a utility company, and others near Shaver Lake, northeast of Fresno, to work alongside Forest Service specialists to identify priority projects for science-based restoration work, including forest thinning projects and prescribed burning to reduce fuels.

On a broader scale in the same region, the Southern Sierra Prescribed Fire Council (SSPFC) serves as a venue for fire specialists, Cal Fire, USFS, national parks, academic institutions, tribes, conservation organizations, and other interested parties to work together to promote, protect, conserve, and expand the responsible use of prescribed fire and cultural fire in the southern Sierra Nevada’s fire-adapted landscapes. The SSPFC also works to promote public understanding and acceptance of the ecological and cultural importance of burning.

Another important statewide effort is the Fire MOU Partnership, which brings together interested parties to increase the use of managed fire – including prescribed fire and natural ignitions – for ecological and other resource benefit. The Partnership includes federal and state land management agencies, air quality control districts, conservation organizations, the timber industry, prescribed fire councils and others, all



Jim Kral, manager of CalFire’s Mountain Home Forest, explains recent prescribed fire to participants on Oct. 2018 field trip—part of the SSPFC annual meeting for agency representatives and conservationists; Chip Ashley and Vicky Hoover represented Sierra Club.

dedicated to creating landscapes that are resilient to the effects of climate change and reducing risks to human communities near wildlands.

As they say, “it takes a village” – and returning fire to California’s natural ecosystems will certainly take an “all hands on deck” approach. It’s taken more than a century to create the conditions we see today, and it will take time and significant investments to restore our ecosystems to a healthy state. Working together, we can make a lasting difference in restoring fire for cultural and ecological benefits. ~

Pamela Flick is Senior California Representative for Defenders of Wildlife, based in Sacramento. She works on Sierra Nevada national forest protection and serves on Sierra Forest Legacy’s advisory board, the Southern Sierra Prescribed Fire Council’s steering committee and the Dinkey Landscape Restoration Project’s Fire Work Group. An avid wilderness lover and third-generation California native, Pam hails from Mariposa in the heart of the Sierra Nevada.

Jared Dahl Aldern is a historical ecologist with long experience in teaching, research, and tribal government work. He has taught Native American history at Palomar College, San Diego State University, and Stanford University and in K-12 public schools. Based in Clovis, California, he serves on the Southern Sierra Prescribed Fire Council’s steering committee and the Dinkey Landscape Restoration Project’s fire and tribal restoration work groups. [www.jareddahldaldern.net](http://www.jareddahldaldern.net).

## Local activists defend wilderness in Inyo Forest

-- by Fran Hunt

The Forest Service released its final Inyo National Forest plan on August 4, 2018. Six years in the making, the new plan will set the strategic direction for wilderness, water, and wildlife and other essential forest resources and activities for the next 15-20 years, if not longer. The release triggered a public Objection phase, beginning with a 60-day document filing period. Sierra Club worked with our many allies in the Sierra Nevada forest planning coalition to craft a strong response to the Final Inyo Plan, designed to defend the plan’s existing safeguards and achieve additional protections for wilderness and other key resources. We mobilized critical public engagement in Inyo and Mono County—including active involvement of Mono County decision makers. Together with Friends of the Inyo (FOI) and The Wilderness Society (TWS), we helped convince Mono County to file an objection to the plan’s wilderness and Wild and Scenic river deficiencies.

With an emphasis on Mono County residents and an additional focus on local business and community leaders, Sierra Club and FOI engaged more than a dozen diverse advocates who were granted Interested Persons (IP) status by the agency. For the February Objection Resolution Meeting we helped find additional individuals to speak and provided training and advice to each IP to maximize their effectiveness.

At the Objection Meeting, when it became clear that the agency had not prioritized speaking opportunities for our IPs, we convinced agency leaders to change the agenda and allow each of our advocates a reasonable opportunity to speak. As a result, Bernie Gyant and other Forest Service leaders heard a solid row of a dozen wilderness advocates who stood, one after another, passionately and effectively advocating for agency wilderness recommendations on the Inyo. Our IPs were a perfect accompaniment to the arguments both TWS staff and Mono County representatives made at the meeting. As a result of our long efforts, the agency is now reconsidering its previous inadequate wilderness recommendations in Mono County (as well as other plan improvements). We hope to see key Mono County wildlands protected by the (revised) final plan. ~

Update:

## Protect Desert National Wildlife Refuge Nevada Legislature gets involved

-- by Anne Henny and Brian Beffort, Toiyabe Chapter Director

In late March, Nevada's Natural Resources Committees—both Senate and Assembly—voted unanimously on two resolutions, AJR 2 and SJR 3, to oppose the U.S. Air Force's proposed expansion into the heart of the Desert National Wildlife Refuge. More than 100 Sierra Club activists and coalition allies showed up at the hearings in Reno and Las Vegas to speak against the expansion, delivering more than 670 petition signatures and comments. The actions garnered press coverage in [the Las Vegas Review Journal](#), [Nevada Capital News](#) and [Nevada Independent](#) among others. (See WOW, Dec 2018 and Dec 2017.)

The Toiyabe Chapter website, <https://www.sierraclub.org/toiyabe>, provides an excellent summary of why we support these resolutions and oppose the Air Force's takeover proposal:

“AJR 2 & SJR 3 – Both urge Congress to oppose the expansion of the United States Air Force in the Desert National Wildlife Refuge in Nevada. POSITION—SUPPORT:

- The Desert National Wildlife Refuge is the largest wildlife refuge in the contiguous United States and contains some of the best habitat for our state animal, the Desert Bighorn Sheep.
- The proposed expansion threatens habitat for numerous species, threatens important cultural resources and threatens existing public access.
- This resolution makes it clear that the State of Nevada opposes the alternatives currently on the table for expansion and encourages a process that protects wildlife habitat, cultural resources & public access.
- This is related to our fight against a proposed nuclear waste repository at Yucca Mountain. The more we turn Nevada into a bombed-out wasteland, the more likely we will be to start receiving hazardous waste from elsewhere, while the more we protect the values of our public lands, the more likely we'll be able to keep such waste out of our state.”

At WOW press time the full Senate and Assembly votes have not yet been

On March 14, the U.S. Forest Service issued their final Environmental Assessment on Nevada's Ruby Mountains -- denying the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) request to offer parcels for leasing--in the Administration push for more fossil fuels. The decision, coming after an outpour of public opposition, restricts BLM from offering parcels in the Ruby Mountains for oil and gas development.

In response, Christian Gerlach of the Sierra Club's Our Wild America campaign stated: “This decision marks a monumental win for our environment, Indigenous Nations and communities who reap the countless benefits of the Ruby Mountains. The Rubies are one of the most iconic and beloved landscapes in Nevada--popular for recreation, critical for wildlife, and vital to nearby communities for their economic and environmental value. Today, we celebrate a significant step forward in stopping the encroachment of dirty fuels

scheduled, so we need to keep the pressure on. If you are a Nevadan, contact your state legislator to say you are in favor of ARJ2, and include your own personal comments. Then repeat the process for SJR3. If you don't know your legislators, this website will help you find and contact them: <http://mapserve1.leg.state.nv.us/whoru/>

**DON'T BOMB THE BIGHORN!** ♻️



photo: Friends of Nevada Wilderness

Sierra Club volunteers join Friends of Nevada Wilderness and brave the unusually cold weather to install parking barriers in the Desert National Wildlife Refuge.

## Forest Service boosts protection for Nevada's Ruby Mountains

New Senate bill would make that lasting

on this landscape for now and forever.

“This win is a direct result of the advocacy by the Te-Moak Tribe of the Western Shoshone, particularly the South Fork and Elko Bands, who worked tirelessly to defend their ancestral homelands. We applaud and thank the thousands of people who raised their voices to help save the Rubies from dirty fuels. We will continue working together to ensure this place remains protected.”

The area in question lies within the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest in northeast Nevada surrounding two well-known and popular wilderness areas-- the Ruby Mountains and the East Humboldt.

### Senator Cortez Masto steps in.

Nevada's senior senator, Catherine Cortez Masto, issued a statement in support of the Forest Service action:

“...I commend the Forest Service for recognizing what the majority of Nevadans have loudly said: oil and gas drilling has no place in the Ruby Mountains. The Rubies are a sacred treasure and economic driver for local communities in White Pine and Elko Counties. I'm glad the Federal government listened to the voices of more than 14,000 Nevadans who asked for these precious public lands to be off-limits to oil and gas drilling. I will continue to fight in the Senate for the passage of my Ruby Mountains Protection Act, which would write into law that oil and gas leasing in the Rubies is prohibited and specifically ensure the protection of those beautiful public lands for generations to come....”

The Ruby Mountains Protection Act, S. 258, was introduced into the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress by the Senator at the end of January. It is cosponsored by her colleague, Senator Jacky Rosen. The bill would withdraw approximately 450,000 acres of national forest lands in the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest, in Elko and White Pine Counties, Nevada, from eligibility for oil and gas leasing under the Mineral Leasing Act, but allow existing multiple uses in the forest such as recreation, grazing and mining to continue. ♻️





# Outings

Support wilderness the Sierra Club way!



## April 20 - 21 – Sat-Sun

### Marble Peak backpack/VWA

Join Ventana Wilderness Alliance on an easy backpack in Ventana Wilderness to work on Marble Peak trail and climb the peak. Camp two miles from trailhead. (Not a Sierra Club outing.) Find Info on this and the VWA trips of May 4-5 and May 10-12 on their Meetup site: <https://www.meetup.com/Ventana-Wilderness-Alliance-Meetup>.

## May 4 -5 – Sat-Sun

### Ventana Big Sur trail backpack

Join Ventana Wilderness Alliance backpack for crosscut saw work on the Big Sur Trail. Camp 4.5 miles from the trailhead at Mocho Camp. For info see April 20-21 trip for meetup site.

## May 10 -12 – Sat-Sun

### Ventana South Fork trail backpack

Join Ventana Wilderness Alliance backpack to accomplish crosscut saw work on the South Fork Trail. Camp 4.5 miles from the trailhead at Strawberry Camp. For details see April 20-21 for meetup site.

## May 25-28 – Fri-Mon

### Eastern Nevada Service-Goshute Canyon

Join CA/ NV Wilderness Committee for our Memorial Day service trip with BLM Ely office wilderness staff, from afternoon of May 25 to Monday morning in a new area for our group, Goshute Canyon Wilderness. After a two-year hiatus we work again with BLM's Ely District

wilderness staff, to enhance wilderness in this wild Nevada mountain range. Central commissary offered, RSVPs required. Contact Vicky Hoover, (415)977-5527 or [vicky.hoover@sierraclub.org](mailto:vicky.hoover@sierraclub.org).

## July 4 - 7 – Thurs-Sun

### Black Rock Playa 4<sup>th</sup> of July

Join Great Basin Group on a busy weekend in northern Nevada's Black Rock Desert-- as many Burning Man attendees use this as a "shakedown weekend" for their gear. Possible one-day ham license class. Typical events include visits to hot springs and the Emigrant Trail. No firm schedule set at this writing. Few facilities there, but we'll probably have porta potties. No signups until after 6/15! Contact leader David Book, (775)843-6443.



photo: Vicky Hoover

Wilderness Committee volunteers walk transects in Mojave Trails National Monument on spring desert service trip.

## OUTING Report: Wilderness Committee service trips

In mid-February, Wilderness Committee volunteers worked together with Friends of Nevada Wilderness on a one-day service project in the Desert National Wildlife Refuge north of Las Vegas--helping to define and border a trailhead parking area in Joe Mays Canyon. Snow the night before and a very cold day kept us moving fast! (See p. 6 for a photo of this venture.)

A month later, end of March, Committee volunteers were out again for our annual service trip with Wilderness staff of the BLM's Needles office. In the Mojave Trails National Monument, we helped document suitability of a site for visitor use by walking transects along an old abandoned military runway north of Essex and also helped conduct a visitor survey at the Amboy Crater National Natural Landmark. Our secluded runway campsite featured balmy but windy weather-- and freight train serenades. ♪

## Wilderness and Bicycles: Electric Assist Mountain Bikes: Part 1 – e-Bikes Primer

-- by Geoffrey Smith

**T** rue confession: I am a bicyclist. When I'm not traipsing around in Wilderness and proposed-Wilderness, I like to ride my bicycle. In this article I share news of one segment of the bicycle industry--electric-pedal assist mountain bikes. *These machines present serious wildlands management challenges that we need to be aware of.*

### Introducing Electric Assist

As we look at mountain bicycling in 2019, two things are apparent. First, they have evolved into incredibly advanced, high performance machines that are capable of rapid travel over the most challenging terrain. Second, mountain bikes are showing up with incorporated electric motors in ever-increasing numbers.

"The first thing you should know

about e-bikes is that they're here to stay. Electric bike sales jumped by an incredible 95 percent between July 2016 and July 2017 alone, according to the market research firm NPD Group. It's a nearly \$65 million industry, and there's no sign of a slowdown." (From *Bicycling Magazine*, <https://www.bicycling.com/skills-tips/a20044021/13-things-about-e-bikes/>)

There are three classes of electric-assist bikes:

Class 1: Pedal-assist motor that boosts your pedal speed, but caps at **20 mph**. (No throttle)

Class 2: Throttle-assist that can accelerate the bike up to **20 mph** without pedaling.

Class 3: Pedal-assist bike that caps your throttle speed at **28 mph**. (No throttle). In many areas this class of e-bike is considered a motor vehicle and requires

its riders to be licensed.

Imagine sharing a hiking trail with a bicycle doing 20-28 mph. Imagine you're a deer, coyote, bobcat, or other critter, and one of these comes at you with no warning.....

### Looking forward

This short article has aimed to introduce WOW readers to electric assist bicycle technology and concerns. In Part 2, next issue I will look into current management challenges, and pending regulatory and statutory response to this growing issue. While bicycles will never be permitted in federally designated wilderness, they often have access to potential wilderness areas. It is important to know the industry and be prepared to defend our public lands. ♪

Geoffrey Smith lives in Santa Rosa, CA where he has settled into owning and operating a bicycle shop specializing in folding bikes... including non-motorized mountain bikes.

**Now Online— The Compleat COW -  
WOW predecessor NOW in Digital Edition**

The present wilderness newsletter, Words of the Wild, or WOW, did not spring brand new out of nowhere. It had a venerable predecessor, Call of the Wild, or COW, newsletter of the Sierra Club's San Francisco Bay Chapter Wilderness Committee, which in some 28 years of print, gave rise to the modern phrase, "yellow journalism" – due to the color of the paper this august periodical was printed on. It also modified the well-known phrase, "All the news that's fit to print," to "All the news that fits." (Scissors were used to shorten articles when needed.)

ALL issues of the COW are now online. No longer need anyone feel deprived and cowless, or uncowed. With sincere thanks to Bob McLaughlin, and his amazing wife Theresa Rumjahn who did *all* the scanning and pdf creation for the COMPLEAT COW—digital version. Thank you, Theresa! And thanks to dedicated diehards COW originators Mark Palmer, Eric Wilson, the late Jeff Sawers, Alan Carlton, Bob McLaughlin, and latest joiner Vicky Hoover.

As Bob notes: "Once again, you

can experience boar jokes, Woody Wabbitt, Freddy the Pig, James Watt goes to heaven, Mark's sketches, every "From the Side Pocket" (Jeff's long-running column), plus classic COW irreverent wit. It is a thrilling tale, complete with heroes and heroines (cheers for Phil Burton, Barbara Boxer, Mike Thompson, etc.) and villains (raspberries for the likes of Watt, Pombo, and Pete Wilson).

"Looking back over the run of the COW (1981-2009), it is a pretty good chronicle of our successful (and ongoing) effort to protect California's wild areas. The COW saw five major California wilderness bills (1984 California Wilderness Act, 1992 Condor Range and River Protection Act, 1994 California Desert Protection Act; 2006 Northern California Coastal Wild Heritage Act, 2009 Omnibus Public Land Act--plus state and federal wild river additions, and important new national monuments like Giant Sequoia and Cascade-Siskiyou. We should be proud! The COW records our commitment and passion that helped bring this about."

Click on: "The Compleat Cow.pdf", [https://drive.google.com/file/d/17e1EMirZPZPOZ5T-jH8-QgkbWg9FuLPc\\_/view?usp=drive\\_web](https://drive.google.com/file/d/17e1EMirZPZPOZ5T-jH8-QgkbWg9FuLPc_/view?usp=drive_web). (Contact vicky.hoover@sierraclub.org if this url does not work for you.)

**Celebrate TWO 2019  
Wild anniversaries  
Good theme for Chapter outings!**

**30<sup>th</sup> for Nevada Wilderness  
Protection Act of 1989 and 25<sup>th</sup> for  
California Desert Protection Act**

On December 5, 1989, President George Bush signed 13 new Forest Service wildernesses into law in Nevada -- which previously could boast only ONE wilderness area, the Jarbidge from the original 1964 Act. From 1989 the spectacular high spots of most of Nevada's lofty mountain ranges were protected, such as Arc Dome in the Toiyabes, the Ruby Mountains Wilderness, and Mt Charleston in the Spring Mountains.

Five years later, on October 31, 1994, President Clinton signed the California Desert Protection Act--the largest land protection measure ever passed by Congress other than for Alaska. Two new national parks (from monuments) and a national preserve, and 69 new wilderness areas.

**Chapter and Group Outings  
chairs in both states take note!!**

These anniversaries can be inviting themes for outings during 2019!

The Sierra Club's California/Nevada Wilderness Committee, an issue committee of the CA/NV Regional Conservation Committee, advocates for preservation of unroaded, undeveloped public lands in a wild state, through legislation and appropriate management, and sponsors stewardship and wilderness study outings.

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"Of all the questions which can come before this nation, short of the actual preservation of its existence in a great war, there is none which compares in importance with the great central task of leaving this land even a better land or our descendants than it is for us, and training them into a better race to inhabit the land and pass it on. Conservation is a great moral issue, for it involves the patriotic duty of insuring the safety and continuance of the nation." ~Teddy Roosevelt