



# WORDS OF *the* WILD

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

## Military Takeover threatens dark days ahead for Nevada Wildlands

**Navy and Air Force to strip Wilderness Study areas and Wildlife Refuges of protection?**

-- by Wynne Benti, Toiyabe Chapter

**Introduction:** An hour east of Reno, where the vast green and blue wetlands of the Stillwater and Fallon National Wildlife Refuges touch the edge of the Job Peak and Stillwater Range Wilderness Study Areas, the peaceful quiet is momentary. Overhead, hundreds of white-faced Ibis are arriving in flocks, small groups, in pairs, circling and landing in the surrounding fields and wetlands. They join thousands of other birds, ducks, geese, raptors, shore birds—more than 280 species of migratory birds—that stop at Stillwater on annual migrations between Canada and Mexico. Winged voices fill



Wilderness committee volunteers Anne Henny, Richard Rollins, Alan Carlton and Vicky Hoover join Friends of Nevada Wilderness for a service day in the Desert National Wildlife Refuge in Feb. 2018

of the refuge, to be used as an expanded safety area for an expanded testing area.

Also in October, the Navy released their Fallon Range and Training Complex (FRTC) Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS).

The deadline for the Navy's public comment is **January 15, 2019**. They plan to withdraw 606,685 acres

the air, but are soon drowned out by the engines of a Navy jet from Fallon Range and Training Complex.

### Navy and Air Force Legislative Environmental Impact Statements

In October 2018, the Air Force released its Final Legislative Environmental Impact Statement (LEIS) for the Nevada Test and Training Range's South (bombing) Range, which calls for taking over much of the contiguous Desert National Wildlife Refuge--located a half hour north of Las Vegas. The Air Force plans to take 400,000 acres, including most of the Sheep Range--the very heart

of public lands, including thousands of acres in the Stillwater and Fallon National Wildlife refuges; the Job Peak, Stillwater Range and Clan Alpine wilderness study areas; segments along the Pony Express National Historic Trail; the entire Monte Cristo Mountain range, (highpoint Mt. Annie.) The Navy will permanently close scenic Highway 361 between Middlegate and Gabbs, Nevada, the primary paved access to famed Berlin-Ichthyosaur State Park.

We, the public, will lose access to hundreds of thousands of acres of our public lands if these withdrawals go through. *—continued on page 2*

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## Nevada military takeover threat

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### Background:

In fall 2016, strategically timed for when everyone's attention was on the presidential election, the Navy and Air Force simultaneously released plans to withdraw almost one million acres of public lands to expand bases in northern and southern Nevada. The Navy took public comments for its central Nevada Fallon Range and Training Complex (FRTC), while the Air Force released its Draft LEIS for the Nevada Test and Training Range (NTTR), a half hour north of Las Vegas.

The preferred alternative for both base expansions is essentially the same—to take as much public land as possible to expand warfare training capabilities and high-altitude air-to-ground bombing safety areas—hundreds of thousands of acres of public lands within the Great Basin. These lands will be stripped of refuge status and wilderness study area protections. Refuge and wilderness lands previously absorbed into both ranges have retained USFWS and BLM oversight, but now the military wants to take away those protections completely—creating an uncertain future for wilderness within every military base across the country.

Of the 1.6 million acres set aside for the Desert National Wildlife Refuge (DNWR) in 1936, an area of more than 800,000 acres was taken by NTTR at the onset of WWII. Most of this land was agency-recommended wilderness and managed as such. The military now wants to remove all protections for these lands; ultimately degrading wildlife habitat and biological communities. They no longer want to be required to manage our public lands so as to preserve the wilderness characteristics or habitat for imperiled species.

### Navy Fallon Range expansion proposal—comment by Jan. 15

Less than ten miles north of

Stillwater NWR is the Navy's Bravo-20 bombing range, one of four major bombing areas (Bravo-16, 17, 19 and 20) within the existing 202,859-acre base. If the Navy gets what they want, as detailed in their recent Draft Environmental Impact Statement, 74,000 acres within the Stillwater Range, Jobs Peak and Clan Alpine Wilderness Study Areas will lose all wilderness study area status, while 31,000 acres of additional lands with wilderness character will also lose protection.

### Desert National Wildlife Refuge, imperiled by Air Force Nevada Test & Training Range Final LEIS

Southern Nevada's Desert National Wildlife Refuge protects irreplaceable habitat for one of the largest populations of desert bighorn sheep in Nevada, a species that is dependent on the steep rugged terrain of the higher elevations for escape habitat and lambing grounds. (See WOW, April & Dec 2017)

Despite objections raised by numerous organizations during the Draft LEIS review—Sierra Club, Nevada Depart-

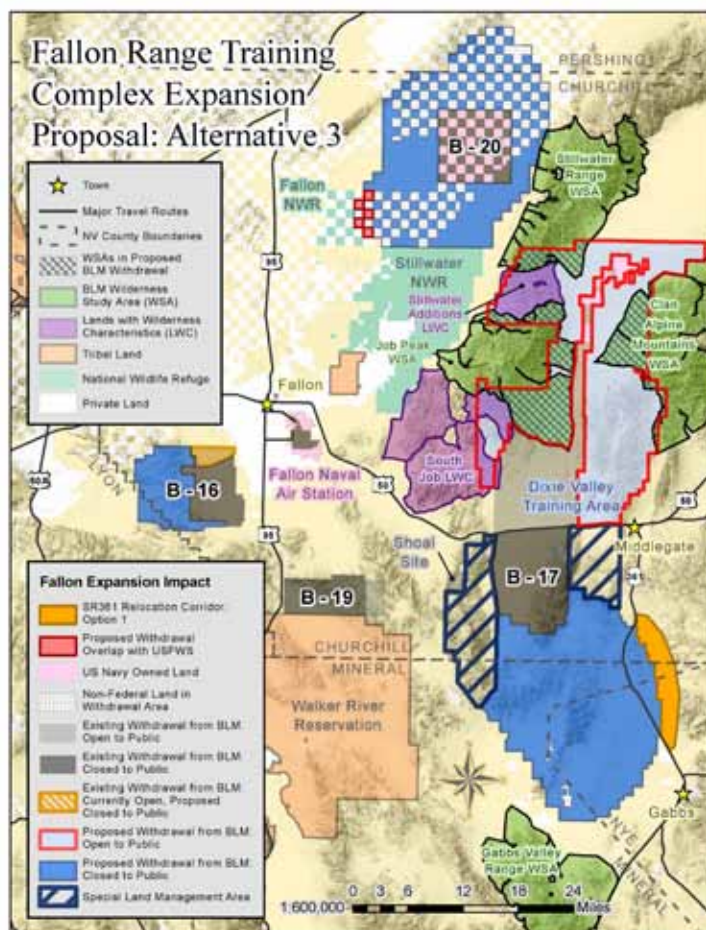
ment of Wildlife, Friends of Nevada Wilderness, the US Fish & Wildlife Service—nothing changed from the draft to the final. The Air Force essentially ignored 32,000 letters submitted by the public. Environmentalists supported Alternative 1, maintaining the status quo. But the final NTTR LEIS seeks to increase military operations and munitions use on the base by 30 percent.

Munitions include high altitude computer guided warheads and air-to-ground tactical missiles; cluster bomb units (CBUs) such as the CBU 52-B which shreds and dismembers; CBU-87, a free-fall cluster composed of depleted radioactive uranium that penetrates seven inches of armor and dispenses 200+ bomblets over an area of roughly 800x400-ft; and the CBU-107, a guided bomb containing metal penetrator rods that can spread over 15 acres.

Additional impacts will include depleted uranium and unexploded ordnance; subsonic and supersonic noise, large caliber weapon noise, construction noise, ground disturbance, threat emitter operations, illuminated nighttime skies and elimination of natural darkness over surrounding regions now exceptionally free of light pollution, including the east scarp of Death Valley's Grapevine Mountains; community annoyance from sonic booms, firing of heavy weaponry, and other noise affecting outlying rural communities of Beatty, Tonopah and Alamo; bird kills in riparian areas from low flying aircraft, mammal kills from unexploded ordinance (UXOs); and visual impacts to scenic quality.

Road closures will include the entire Alamo Road north of Hidden Forest, the only road between Indian Springs and Alamo; Pine Canyon Road, Pine Canyon Trail; White Rock Road and White Rock Canyon; Dead Horse Road and Dead Horse Trail-head; Saddle Mountain, Sheep Pass, Cabin Springs Road; Desert lake and Old Corn

-- continued on page 3





**Nevada military takeover** - from page 2  
Creek Road.

Wildlife biologists will no longer have access to the range and bighorn sheep habitat. Base expansion will severely weaken management practices and scale down our knowledge of seasonal migration patterns, population sizes, and overall species health.

**Fate of these lands in up to Congress! Please write your Congressional representatives:**

Fate of the Desert Refuge and Fallon Range will now be in the hands of Congress. That means it is *up to us, the concerned public*, to bring into play our great influence on Congress, as citizen activists, by fearlessly writing and calling our Representatives and Senators. For both these large expanses of wild public lands, our Representatives and Senators will make the final decision, tell them: oppose the military land withdrawals of public lands. Support the status quo (keep things the way they are), and stop the proposed Air Force expansion into the Desert National Wildlife Refuge and Navy expansion into public lands surrounding the Fallon Range and Training Complex.

In addition to writing your Congressional representative and both your Senators, please get familiar with with the wild values of these places. If you are in the Las Vegas area – do visit the Desert Refuge’s Corn Spring Visitor Center—easy to get to just north of the city—with excellent informative exhibits. And check out the descriptive video: <https://vimeo.com/285543688>.

**MORE INFO for MORE WAYS to HELP:**

Go to the website of Friends of Nevada Wilderness at <https://www.nevadawilderness.org/>. Respond to action calls: <https://www.nevadawilderness.org/fallonexpansion>. And, <https://www.nevadawilderness.org/dnwr>

AND send your Navy DEIS comments--see adjacent action box.

## Senator Harris introduces bills to protect California wild places

-- by Steve Evans

Just days before Congress was scheduled to adjourn for 2018, California Senator Kamala Harris introduced two bills to protect California wild public lands-- in southern California’s San Gabriel Mountains and in northwest California.

Senator Harris’ San Gabriel Mountains, Foothills, and River Protection Act, introduced on Dec. 5, proposes protection of 31,069 acres of new wilderness and wilderness additions, plus 45.5 miles of wild and scenic rivers in the San Gabriel Mountains National Monument and Angeles National Forest. The bill also expands the existing San Gabriel Mountains National Monument by 109,143 acres to include the Big Tujunga and Pacoima watersheds and much of the San Gabriel front country stretching west and north from Pasadena to Santa Clarita. In addition, the bill establishes a 51,107-acre San Gabriel National Recreation Area along the lower San Gabriel River and Rio Hondo channels from Azusa to Whittier, and includes the existing Santa Fe Dam and Whittier Narrows Recreation Areas. The new Senate bill is a combined version of H.R. 2323 and H.R. 3039 introduced by Rep. Judy Chu (D-CA27) in 2017.

You can view the Senator’s video explanation of her bill on: <https://twitter.com/SenKamalaHarris/status/1070414276123336706>.

Sen. Harris’ Northwest California Wilderness, Recreation, and Working Forests Act is a Senate companion measure to H.R. 6596, introduced by Rep. Jared Huffman (D-San Rafael/Eureka) in July 2018. (See WOW, Aug 2018) It focuses on public lands in Trinity, Del Norte, Humboldt, and Mendocino Counties. The bill proposes 313,177 acres of wilderness, wilderness additions, and potential wilderness, along with nearly 480 miles of wild and scenic rivers. The bill also includes a 730,000-acre special restoration area encompassing the South Fork Trinity and Mad River watersheds and several other provisions, such as visitor centers in Del Norte and Trinity Counties, old growth redwoods restoration, restoring public lands damaged by illegal marijuana cultivation, and a proposed Big Foot National Recreation Trail.

Altogether, bills introduced or cosponsored by Senator Harris in this Congress would protect more than 1.5 million acres of public lands as wilderness, national park additions, wild and scenic rivers, scenic areas, and other protective designations in the California Desert, San Gabriel Mountains, Central Coast, and Northwest California.

Senate action seems unlikely on Senator Harris’s new bills in the final days of the current Congress. 🌀

➡ **WHAT YOU CAN DO -- BY JANUARY 15:**

**Submit written comments to the Navy on the Draft Fallon proposal BY JANUARY 15:** TELL THE NAVY -- (as you told your Senators and Representative) -- you oppose the military land withdrawals of public lands; you support the status quo to keep things the way they are, Urge them to keep Wilderness Study Area protection for 74,000 acres in the Clan Alpine Mountain, Job Peak, and Stillwater Range WSAs. Urge them not to eliminate recreation use and public access to 18 percent of the Fallon National Wildlife Refuge, or to more than 400,000 acres of public land in all.

**WRITE before January 15 to:**  
Naval Facilities Engineering Command Southwest,  
Code EV21.SG  
1220 Pacific Highway, Bldg 1, 5th Floor  
San Diego, CA 92132  
Or comment online at: <https://frtcmmodernization.com/Documents/2018-Fallon-Range-Training-Complex-Modernization-EIS/Draft-EIS> 🌀



Desert Bighorn by Sharon Schaffer

from Friends of Nevada Wilderness

# California Dam Projects Threaten Public Lands and Wild Rivers

-- by Steve Evans

The Trump Regime and the Republican majority in Congress are moving forward with federal funding for two destructive and unnecessary dam projects in California.

The federal government is currently investing millions of taxpayer dollars to complete engineering studies for the proposed Temperance Flat Dam on the San Joaquin River Gorge in the Sierra Nevada foothills northeast of Fresno and for raising Shasta Dam on the McCloud River in the southern Cascade Range north of Redding. The dam projects threaten river canyons with outstanding scenery, outdoor recreational opportunities, fish and wildlife, and Native American cultural values. The California Wilderness Coalition (CalWild) recently listed the San Joaquin River Gorge and the McCloud River as two of five most threatened public land wild places in California (visit <https://www.calwild.org/top5threats/> for more information).

## Temperance Flat Dam proposed in Sierra foothills

Costing taxpayers well over \$3 billion, the proposed Temperance Flat Dam would be the second highest dam in California and yet would increase the state's surface water supply by less than one percent. It would flood more than 5,000 acres of federal public lands in the San Joaquin River Gorge, frequented by 84,000 visitors annually. Rich in Native American cultural values, the Gorge includes three campgrounds, an environmental education center and museum, and an extensive trail system used by hikers, mountain bikers, and equestrians--all of which would drown behind the dam. The dam would also flood habitat for 24 sensitive, threatened, and endangered species and the unique but relatively unexplored Millerton Caves. Because of these outstanding values, the Bureau of Land Management has recommended National Wild and Scenic River protection for the Gorge.

Constructing the dam would take

fresh water away from current efforts to restore the river's extinct spring chinook salmon run. Ironically, so many major dams already block and divert water from the San Joaquin River that it typically runs dry west of Fresno. A UC Davis study found that the state has over-allocated water rights from the San Joaquin River by a staggering 861 percent. An economic review by a University of the Pacific economist found that the dam proponents have grossly overestimated its benefits. The California Water Commission determined that Temperance Flat would return only 41 cents for every dollar of public money invested in the project, but this didn't stop the Commission from allocating \$171 million in Proposition 1 bond funding for this boondoggle dam.

Environmentalists have fought the Temperance Flat dam project for many years—pointing out that the best and most effective dam sites in California have long since been taken, new dams would flood river canyons with outstanding natural and cultural values, large surface reservoirs lose significant amounts of water through evaporation, and in general, California has plenty of water storage capacity—but we often don't have enough snow-melt and rain water to keep even present reservoirs full.

In 2011, the California/Nevada Wilderness Committee enjoyed a field trip to the proposed Temperance Flat dam site.

## Shasta Dam boondoggle proposed

Another dam project pushed by the Trump Regime is a proposed 18-foot raising of Shasta Dam. Costing an estimated \$1.3 billion, the higher

dam would flood more than a mile of the state-protected McCloud River. Earlier this year, California Natural Resources Secretary John Laird put Trump's Interior Department on notice that raising this dam violates state law. Expanding Shasta Reservoir would flood 2,600 acres of the Shasta-Trinity National Recreation Area, drown most of the known populations of the Shasta snow wreath (a rare plant) and the Shasta limestone salamander, and



Wilderness Committee 2011 field trip visits San Joaquin River Gorge, just upstream from proposed Temperance Dam and threatened by flooding

destroy cultural sites used today by the Winnemem Wintu Tribe. All this would be lost permanently to increase the state's surface water supply by slightly more than 1/10<sup>th</sup> of one percent.

### ⇒ What You Can Do:

Contact Senator Kamala Harris and urge her to oppose federal efforts to fund the Temperance Flat Dam on the San Joaquin River Gorge and to raise Shasta Dam on the McCloud River. Urge her to add these rivers to our National Wild and Scenic Rivers System to protect them for present and future generations. You can deliver this message to Senator Harris's public comment portal at <https://www.harris.senate.gov/contact/email>. Or call her office at 202-224-3553. ↻

(Steve Evans is Wild and Scenic River Program Director for the California Wilderness Coalition (CalWild) and is a long-time active member of the Sierra Club's Mother Lode Chapter.)



# Clock Ticking on the Yaudanchi Ecological Reserve

-- by Richard Garcia and Elizabeth Sosaya

For centuries the Yaudanchi people thrived on the eastern edge of California's bountiful Central Valley where the Tule River forms an alluvial fan as it tumbles out of the southern Sierra Nevada. A small sub-tribe of the Yokuts Indians, the Yaudanchi coexisted with nature in an incredibly rich and diverse oak woodland forest that stretched westward entwined with the maze of creeks and sloughs that flowed to the shoreline of the vast Tule Lake. The shallow lake was the largest body of fresh water west of the Mississippi River--and sustained massive tule reed marsh wetlands that were a primeval oasis for millions of native and migrating waterfowl on the Pacific flyway.

Stories passed down by generations of early settlers in the Tule and Kaweah River basins tell of great tule elk and deer herds, mighty grizzly bears, badgers, kangaroo rats, foxes, fish, frogs, crawdads, mosquitoes, and flocks of migrating birds that could block the sun when taking flight. Early travelers could ride for miles between

wetland habitat only remnants of the valley's once abundant wildlife remain.

One small area, however, just east of the town of Porterville, was saved from development and was designated an Ecological Reserve--largely through the efforts of local individuals, diverse community groups, and persistent citizens. In 1977, recognizing the value of this land, the people of Porterville along with numerous groups-- including the Porterville City Council, the Tulare County Board of Supervisors, the Kern and Tulare County Audubon Societies, and the Porterville State Hospital's Board--banded together to urge the state to retain the property and turn it into a preserve.

Working together they created the **Yaudanchi Ecological Reserve** that consists of over 165 acres of rare undeveloped Tule River floodplain and provides riparian and wetland habitat for a multitude of plants and animals. The property, with its hiking trails, was open to the public for over forty years. Porterville schools used it as an outdoor classroom. Located on efficient aquifers

over the river's historic old channel, it would be pressed into service as a groundwater recharge ponding basin during wet years and at times functioned as a blue heron rookery. In the dry years the reserve's only water lifeline is the open unlined Campbell-Moreland Ditch that traverses the Yaudanchi Reserve property.

The creation of the reserve involved a contract between the Porterville Developmental Center (PDC) that owned the land and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife who were to manage the land. In reality, since PDC is a state agency, the actual owner of this land is the state of California.

## Sudden closure—reserve threatened

In the fall of 2017, with no public notice and no public input, the Porterville Developmental Center



Blue Heron

Tulare County Treasures

www.tularecountytreasures.org

terminated its agreement with the Department of Fish and Wildlife to manage the Reserve. Abruptly, gates were locked and signs removed. For all intents and purposes, Yaudanchi Ecological Reserve was closed. The only reason given was that the Reserve was no longer going to be managed for habitat and wildlife "because of the pipeline".

Pipeline? A few persistent citizens, including members of the local Sierra Club, learned that the Vandalia Water District was proposing a pipeline on the property without doing an Environmental Impact Report. The proponents of the pipeline have pinned their hopes on a deficient DRAFT Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration. The inadequate document failed to mention that the pipeline would replace a waterway that was located on an Ecological Reserve and that the project would effectively ensure the demise of the reserve. The MND document also failed to address the impact that the pipeline project would have on groundwater aquifers and downstream well users, including the nearby City of Porterville.

After receiving strong persuasive verbal and written comments from concerned activists and native plant and bird experts as well as a few letters from our attorney pointing out their many CEQA and Brown Act transgressions, the Vandalia Water District put the project on a temporary "hold" at a June, 2018 MND hearing. The Water District contends that this is only a slight delay, and they plan to proceed with the pipeline project. In the meantime the PDC is proceeding with its plan to terminate the CDF&W agreement with little or no public debate.

The future of the Yaudanchi Ecological Reserve -- continued on page 6

Tulare County Treasures www.tularecountytreasures.org



Temporary riparian habitat & groundwater recharge in wet years.

the small valley towns that flourished in these massive oak and sycamore groves and never leave the shade of the giant trees and vines thriving in the rich sandy loam soil.

The landscape is vastly different now--the rivers are dammed, water diverted, farms, dairies, and houses prevail, the dry lake bed is cultivated by large farming operations with a thirst for the valley's receding groundwater. With the loss of this

is in great peril. A recently approved federally funded project to raise the upstream Tule River Success Dam will undoubtedly have an impact on the reserve. The Army Corp of Engineers and the irrigation companies will no doubt want to limit flood releases like the ones that traditionally helped the reserve's riparian wildlife. If raising this dam is inevitable, perhaps environmentalists can negotiate for mitigation measures that include sharing some of that captured water to nurture and recharge the natural world.

### Saving Nearby Nature--near home

In our never-ending battle to save the planet's remaining wild places, we should not overlook the small enclaves of the natural world that are near our communities--like the threatened Yaudanchi Ecological Reserve. Our immediate concerns for this reserve are focused on halting the pending Vandalia Water District Campbell-Moreland Ditch pipeline project.

We would welcome help in trying to uncover the state's plans for the property

## Bringing the Land & Water Conservation Fund back to life

The Land and Water Conservation Fund expired on September 30, 2018.

Only two weeks earlier, in mid-September, HR 502, the House of Representatives reauthorization bill for "America's most successful conservation program," which had been blocked for two Congresses in the Natural Resources Committee by the hostility of its chair, Rep. Bishop of Utah, finally passed out of committee and was ready for a full House vote. Due to other Congressional priorities, that vote did not take place before expiration and the House recess for election activities.

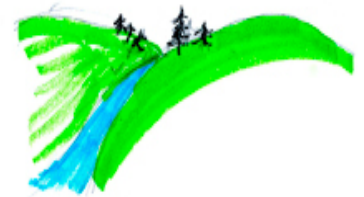
(Chairman Bishop did not just wake up one morning saying, Oh, the LWCF is ok after all. He was under heavy pressure, directly from many of his republican colleagues whose districts had benefited from funding by the LWCF, and also from House Leadership who had heard complaints from many republicans that Mr. Bishop alone was holding up this popular federal funding program for parks and other outdoor recreation facilities in communities large and small across the nation.)

Shortly after the House bill passed Committee, the Senate reauthorization bill also cleared its committee. Champion of the

WildPlaces are working to save this place by educating the public on the ecologically vital role local wild wetlands play in nurturing healthy habitats and aquifers.

For more information on how to help save the Yaudanchi Ecological Reserve, contact Richard J. Garcia <[richardjgarcia@comcast.net](mailto:richardjgarcia@comcast.net)>. And learn more at <http://www.tularecountytreasures.org/yaudanchi-ecological-reserve.html>.

(Richard Garcia lives in Visalia, CA, and is a longtime member of the Kern-Kaweah Chapter Ex-Com who likes working on wildlife and valley water issues. Elizabeth Sosaya is Richard's sister and is a retired Special Education teacher, environmentalist and poet living in Templeton, CA.)



House bill HR 502 is Rep. Raul Grijalva, lead Democrat on the Natural Resources Committee. The change in House party majority sets up this environmental hero to chair that key committee next year.

There is hardly any other program in this fractured Congress that has so much bipartisan support. The two similar LWCF Senate bills have 54 cosponsors, and the House bill now has 242. That's plenty to pass. Both bills call for permanent reauthorization of the LWCF. We'd welcome not having to go through this agony again.

Lack of time remaining in the lame duck session of Congress is the main problem now. Originally planned to end December 7, the lame duck has been extended for two more weeks, as the outgoing majority uses its last chance to push through harmful measures. Inconclusive negotiations are occurring about including the LWCF bill in a lands package along with another popular bill -- one to help fund the national parks' severe maintenance backlog. The extra two weeks makes it impossible now to predict a final 2018 result for the LWCF.

California has received more moneys from the LWCF than any other state. Funds are divided mainly between the two principal LWCF programs, "direct federal acquisitions" -- which lets federal agencies acquire private inholdings in federal parks, forests, refuges, etc -- and "state and local assistance" which provides matching grants to help states, counties and communities acquire land for and develop outdoor recreation facilities--parks, swimming pools, tennis courts, bike trails, campgrounds, marinas, etc.

-- Vicky Hoover

Tulare County Treasures [www.tularecountytreasures.org](http://www.tularecountytreasures.org)



In dry years flows through the Campbell-Moreland Ditch are frequently stopped between irrigation runs.

now that the Porterville Developmental Center has terminated their longstanding agreement with the California DF&W. For now, the 165-acre Yaudanchi property is still on the books as a State Ecological Reserve, but we fear this land may get listed as "surplus" and sold.

With the financial support of the Kern-Kaweah Chapter of the Sierra Club, a small group of activists including members of the Chapter's local Mineral King Group and local leaders of the California Native Plant Society, Tulare County Audubon, and



## Mono Basin Sage Grouse update

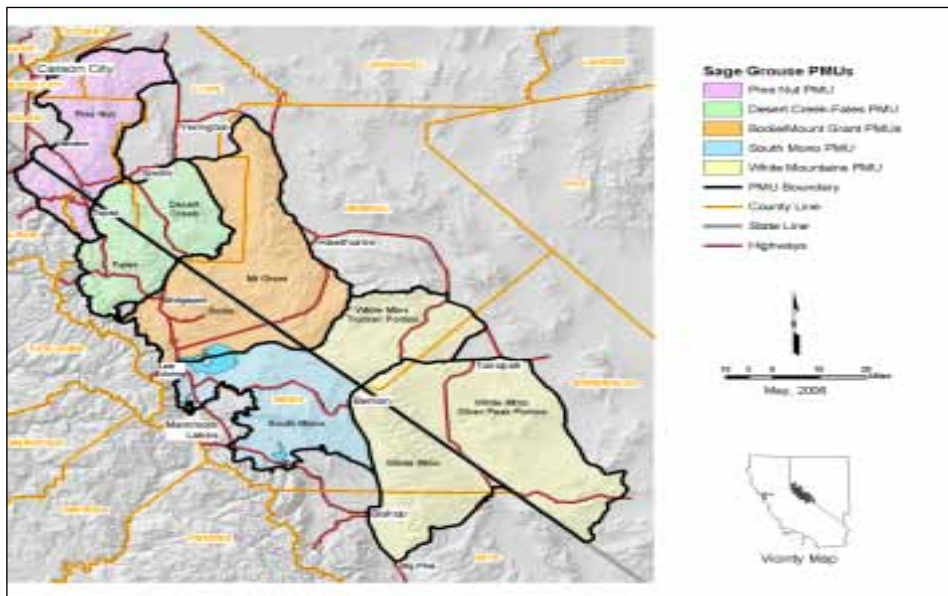
At the end of August, a federal judge ordered the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to reinstate its rescinded proposed listing of the Bi-state Sage Grouse (mainly found along the California-Nevada line in Mono County and adjacent Nevada) under the Endangered Species Act. The judge also ordered the reinstatement of a proposed designation of more than 2,800 square miles in the Eastern Sierra as critical bi-state sage grouse habitat.

The judge said that the Fish and Wildlife Service ignored its own best scientific evidence when it reversed course three years ago on its 2013 proposal to declare the bi-state grouse threatened.

His ruling gives the agency until Oct. 1, 2019, to publish a new final listing determination in the Federal Register.

There is a dwindling number of bi-state sage grouse (often referred to as Mono Basin sage grouse) in the Mono Basin. They're closely related to but distinct from the greater sage grouse, which lives in a broad expanse of habitat across a dozen western states and is at the center of a dispute over administration efforts to roll back protections adopted under President Obama.

Leaders of three conservation groups who sued to protect the bi-state grouse said the new ruling could help save the ground-dwelling bird as well as other populations. "This important victory



## Comment on Plumas National Forest Snowmobile Plan up to January 24



### Keep Plumas Quiet

Currently, the only refuge for non-motorized winter recreation on the Plumas National Forest is the Bucks Lake Wilderness. Of the 152 peaks in Plumas County over 6,000' in elevation only a handful do not allow snowmobiles. In today's chaotic world people need refuge from the pollution and noise of civilization; we need more places to savor clean air and quiet.

Partner organizations focused especially on winter quiet recreation in

reinstates crucial protections for these beleaguered birds while a new listing decision is made," said Lisa Belenky, senior attorney for the Center for Biological Diversity in Oakland, CA.

Designating critical habitat for the bi-state sage grouse could eventually bring new restrictions on a wide variety of development in the Mono Basin, from Carson City to south of Tonopah, Nevada, and Bishop, California - an area bigger than the state of Delaware.

More: <http://www.kunc.org/post/us-judge-reinstates-proposed-1>.

In the meantime, the prognosis for Mono Basin and all sage grouse and their habitat worsened, as, in early December, the administration announced a new plan for a major rollback of protections for sage grouse, potentially opening 9 million acres to oil drilling. Stay tuned. ☺

the affected northern California region, including Snowlands Network [www.snowlands.org](http://www.snowlands.org), Winter Wildlands Alliance, <https://winterwildlands.org/plumas-national-forest/> and Friends of Plumas Wilderness <http://plumaswilderness.org/maintain/saving-winter-wildlands/> are recommending support for Alternative 2, the Forest's Proposed Action, with key specific modifications listed below:

- \*\* Do not allow grooming on Forest Road 24N33 that would encourage snowmobiles to trespass into Bucks Lake Wilderness;
- \*\* Do not designate OSV use on or around Lakes Basin Snowshoe and Ski Trails;
- \*\* Do not allow snowmobiles in Little Jamison Basin;
- \*\* Do not allow snowmobile use in any proposed wilderness areas, including Middle Feather, Bucks Creek, Chips, Grizzly, & Adams Peak.

### Good features of Alternative 2, the proposed Action

The Plumas National Forest Draft Winter Travel Plan's Proposed Action protects:

- \*\* Wilderness, Wild Rivers, Roadless Areas, Research Natural Areas, and Special Interest Areas;
  - \*\* Big game winter habitat below 3,500 feet;
  - \*\* Backcountry skiing east of Bucks Lake Wilderness and on Thompson Peak by Susanville;
  - \*\* Cross-country skiing on the Bucks Creek Loop Trail;
  - \*\* Historic Lost Sierra Ski Traverse Route.
- \*Urge these protections remain in force.

### ☞ Please comment to help keep Plumas quiet.

Three ways to submit comments on **Over-Snow Vehicle Use Designation Draft Environmental Impact Statement:**

- \*\* On the Forest Service project page webform at <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=47124>.
- \*\* Mail or deliver comments to Plumas National Forest, Attn: Katherine Carpenter, 159 Lawrence St, Quincy, CA 95971.
- \*\* Fax comments to (530)283-7746. ☺

# Enduring Service in the Big Sur Backcountry

## Ventana Wilderness Alliance works with cash-strapped agency

-- by Mike Splain

In days of yore, one could set out on a National Forest trail and reasonably expect to cross paths with a Ranger. The Forest Service had a budget earmarked for recreation, and rangers often embarked on backcountry patrols, greeting visitors as they maintained trails. Enter “Reaganomics”. With the crusade for privatization and reduced government spending, public land agencies had little choice but to lay off field staff and cede front-country chores to private concessionaires.

The effects have been particularly severe on coastal/central California’s Los Padres National Forest, which saw its recreation budget slashed six-fold. Backcountry infrastructure crumbled as non-profit partners struggled to fill the void.

spring has become an attractive nuisance; throngs overwhelm nearby camps with amplified music, toilet paper, and abandoned gear. Search and Rescue crews endure a staggering workload as helicopter evacuations shatter the solitude.

In 2010, the Ventana Wilderness Alliance (VWA) began partnering with the Monterey Ranger District to recruit and deploy Volunteer Wilderness Rangers. Long-time VWA, Forest Service, and Sierra Club volunteer Steve Benoit has shepherded the program to great success. It’s a simple formula. The VWA funds training, first-aid certification, and tools; the Monterey Ranger District provides communication support.

Last year, Steve’s elite corps of 18 Rangers conducted 100 patrols, cleaned up 149 campsites, and packed out 178 pounds of trash, (much of it microtrash that is painstakingly difficult to collect) while imparting fire safety and Leave No Trace principles to 1,959 fellow Forest visitors.

The Forest Service recently honored Steve Benoit’s inspiring leadership by recognizing him as the agency’s national 2018

Enduring Service Volunteer of the Year. Steve hopes this

recognition motivates others to roll up their sleeves and get involved in the practical on-the-ground conservation of our precious public lands.

To learn more about Big Sur backcountry conservation and the Volunteer Wilderness Ranger program, please visit [www.ventanawild.org](http://www.ventanawild.org). (And see p. 9 for two VWA outings.)

*Mike Splain is Ventana Chapter Wilderness Chair as well as Ventana Wilderness Alliance Executive Director.*



Heather Anderson in Denver with Tehipite Chapter Excomm member Joanne Clarke

photo: Vicky Hoover

## Heather Anderson gets Special Service Award

Heather Anderson, long serving as CA/NV Wilderness Committee’s wilderness lead in the Tehipite Chapter based in Fresno, moved to Bend, Oregon, during 2018 to be near her son and his family. Her Chapter, missing her steady support and involvement, promptly nominated her for a national Special Service award, which she received at the Sierra Club annual meeting’s award ceremony, in Denver, Colorado, at the end of September.

## Land acquisition protects Condor Trail access



The Wilderness Land Trust reports on its latest acquisition to help California wilderness: The California Condor/High Mountain/ Trout Creek trail provides public access into the Santa Lucia and Garcia Wilderness areas. The land is also home to mule deer, black bear, wild turkeys, peregrine falcon, horned toad and other wildlife.

To protect this land, the Wilderness Land Trust just closed on the purchase of a 324-acre property that could have been developed, cutting off public access to the popular trail and disrupting wildlife.

We are grateful for contributions from the San Luis Obispo Park and Open Space Foundation, the Backcountry Horseman’s Association, Pacific Coast Long Riders, Atascadero Horseman’s Association, generous donors and a Protect the California Condor Trail Go Fund Me campaign that helped make this purchase a reality.

To help raise the additional funds necessary to transfer the land to the Los Padres National Forest., please visit the campaign page at <https://www.gofundme.com/save-the-california-condor-trail>. For a previous report on the Condor Trail project see WOW, April 2016.)

(photo: Ventana Wilderness Alliance)



Congressman Jimmy Panetta (left), and Monterey County Supervisor Mary Adams (right), with USFS Enduring Service Volunteer of the Year Steve Benoit.

Soon, remote and once-obscure Wilderness locales “went viral” on social media. With visitation on the rise and “no one to mind the store”, careless and even downright malicious behavior ensued.

On the Forest’s vast Monterey Ranger District (more commonly known as the Big Sur backcountry), symptoms of under-management abound. Dry season campfires and marijuana grow sites are commonplace. A popular hot





# Outings



**Support wilderness the Sierra Club way!**

*--May your trails be crooked, winding, lonesome, dangerous, leading to the most amazing view. May your mountains rise into and above the clouds. -- Edward Abbey (as quoted in Range of Light Group newsletter)*

(A partner activity; not a Sierra Club outing.)

## **January 12 -13, 2019 -- Sat-Sun**

### **Marble Peak Trail Work**

Ventana Wilderness Alliance work trip for trail brushing on Marble Peak Trail. Good introduction to trailwork, plus excellent opportunity to see this remote area. Jobs for all abilities. Car camp Saturday night at Marble Peak. Work on Marble Peak Trail starting at the trailhead. We hope to get about halfway down to the junction with Lost Valley Trail. To sign up, contact leader Betsy Macgowan at <bmacgowan@hotmail.com>.

## **February 15--Fri**

### **Mojave Preserve Restoration**

Join CA/NV Desert Committee and National Park Service for another restoration project in the Mojave National Preserve (MNP) the day before Wilderness & Desert meeting Sat and Sun. Gather Fri 8:45 am, work through afternoon, and adjourn in time to reach Shoshone for dinner. Our primary task is to remove "culturally planted species" (tamarisk, fan palm, sunflowers) at Desert Studies Center, Zzyzx. Contact John Hiatt at <hjhiatt@gmail.com> for details, directions, and to RSVP. Don't miss this pre-Shoshone service.

(A partner activity; not a Sierra Club outing.)

## **Feb 16 – 18 – Sat-Mon**

### **Big Sur Trail Work Backpack**

A two-night strenuous Ventana Wilderness Alliance work trip with a long climb at end of last day. Bring personal gear and food for duration of trip, and also work gloves, sturdy work clothes, protective eyewear, sturdy shoes or boots, day pack able to carry 2 liters of water, extra food and snacks, poison oak lotion if you need it, your favorite loppers and handsaw--otherwise tools will be provided as well as hard hats. Bring a contribution to the famous, festive VWA hors d'oeuvres POTLUCK. Meet Big Sur Station 8 am Sat. <https://www.meetup.com/Ventana-Wilderness-Alliance-Meetup/events/>, or contact Betsy Macgowan, see Jan 12-13.

## **February 18 – Mon**

### **Desert Refuge Service, Southern NV**

For Presidents' Day, join CA/NV Wilderness Com for a service project

with Friends of Nevada Wilderness (the day after our Shoshone meeting.) The vast Desert National Wildlife Refuge is under threat from military expansion. (See article, pp 1-3). Help Fish & Wildlife Service in Joe May canyon, one of several backcountry trailheads where they seek to install interpretive kiosks and build fences to define parking areas. Car camping, central commissary Sun and Mon nights; For details & sign up, contact vicky. hoover@sierraclub.org, (415)977-5527.

## **February 25 - 28 -- Mon-Thurs**

### **Death Valley NP Camping & Hiking**

Join Mojave Group outing; meet Mon noon at Panamint Springs Campground (\$10 per car) on Hwy. 190 just off Panamint Valley Rd. In afternoon hike to Darwin Falls. Tues. move to Mesquite Springs Campground and hike rim of Ubehebe Crater. Wed hike Titus Canyon. Thurs. pack up and hike in morning on Mesquite Dunes; then head home. All hikes leisurely. Reserve with Carol Wiley earthingwiley2000@yahoo.com, (760)245-8734.

## **March 12 – 14 -- Tues-Thurs**

### **Afton Canyon Outing**

Mojave Group outing will camp two nights at BLM campground at Mojave River in the new Mojave Trails National Monument. Meet Tues noon and hike up a side canyon in the afternoon. Wed we will hike Afton Canyon sites and Thurs morning hike to a hoodoos area--at leisurely pace. To reserve, contact Carol Wiley (see Feb 25-28.)

## **March 29 - 31 -- Fri-Sun**

### **California Desert Wilderness service**

For 20 years we have been lucky to work on the wilderness units managed by the BLM's Needles Field Office. Now as we start our third decade we have the privilege to focus on the Mojave Trails National Monument, with five wilderness units. We will be walking surveys on Camp Clipper, an old WWII camp. Join us! Central commissary, car camping -- location details and sign up with Vicky (see Feb 18.)

## **May 25 - 28 -- Fri-Mon**

### **Memorial Day NV Wilderness Service**

*Preliminary announcement!* Join CA/NV Wilderness Committee as after a two-year hiatus we work with BLM's Ely District wilderness staff--in eastern Nevada's Highland Range Wilderness again--or in Goshute Canyon Wil-

derness, new for our group. Central commissary, RSVPs required. Contact Vicky--see Feb 18.

(A partner activity; not a Sierra Club outing.)

## **Various dates--Dec 2018 to March 2019.**

### **Salt Tram Protection Project**

Help Marty Dickes, Bureau of Land Management Ridgecrest Field Office Wilderness Coordinator, to protect the historic Salt Tram in the Inyo Mts from fire damage. The Saline Valley Salt Tram, built in 1912 to transport salt over the Inyo Mountains to the Owens Valley. and last used in 1935, with its wood towers and steel machinery is now a National Register Historic Site. Small pine tree growth makes tram towers susceptible to wildfire destruction. With a BLM crew, volunteers will help establish firebreaks at structures. Carpool to Inyo crest in 4WD high-clearance vehicles for a 2-night car camp at 8,700 ft. Volunteers will reach work sites on foot and use hand tools to remove small pine trees. A rewarding venture in an awe-inspiring desert place. For dates, details contact Marty Dickes: mdickes@blm.gov, (760)384-5444.

## **Beauty Mountain Public Lands Day service**

BLM reports that during National Public Lands Day in September, in the Beauty Mountain Wilderness, 25 volunteers helped clean up a shooting site, including removal of invasive non native Russian thistle.

The 15,000-acre Wilderness, designated by the Public Lands Omnibus Act of 2009, comprises the Riverside County portion of a larger roadless area with an important portion in northern San Diego County. ♪



Wilderness Committee Beauty Mountain hike in May 2010

photo: Vicky Hoover

## Muir Memorial Shelter— Historical Landmark plaque installed; maintenance needs detailed

In 2016 we reported on the outing into the John Muir Wilderness and Kings Canyon National Park Wilderness to celebrate addition of the Sierra Club's Muir Memorial Shelter, or Muir Hut, on Muir Pass at almost 12,000 feet to the nation's official list of National Historical Landmarks. (See WOW, Dec 2016) The complex nomination process to afford the Muir Hut this historical status was undertaken by Pennsylvania Chapter member and legacy architect Doug Harnsberger—who received a national Sierra Club Special Achievement award in 2017 for his effort.

This past summer Doug went back up to Muir Pass to help in the permanent installation of the 110-pound bronze plaque that had been carried up to the Shelter by National Park Service mules for the 2016 ceremony to honor the new status of the Muir Memorial Shelter. One previous plan to install the plaque had been put off by the heavy snowpack in 2017. Together with Sequoia-Kings Canyon Park craftsman Thor Riksheim and filmmaker Julia Marshall, Doug and his daughter Giles journeyed into the high Sierra wilderness in August to take the plaque from its temporary resting place and properly install it inside the Shelter above the fireplace. NPS's Rikshelm used three custom-fabricated stainless steel brackets to support the plaque, anchoring the brackets with threaded rods permanently into the mantel with a special epoxy that ought to make it impossible for anyone to remove the heavy plaque.

The team also made a careful assessment of the condition of the Muir Shelter and determined some priority

maintenance needs; Harnsberger reports: “The historic shelter needs our collective attention if it is to remain a viable and healthy structure in the future. The wetness and dankness of the interior chamber was quite obvious when we were there. The recent blocking up of the fireplace flue did not help the interior air circulation. Thor tells me that the original side window was operative, but that it was made into a fixed window a few years ago. I would like to see the fixed window converted back into a functional awning window that opens up to let air circulate. The chamber will stay forever dank and clammy all summer long without some flow-through air circulation.”

Other maintenance needs:

High priority: repoint the leaking granite roof, especially at the chimney/roof joint above the mantel;

Replace cracked wire-glass window pane, and perhaps return the window to its original operable function;

Entry door - rehang the Dutch doors with new hinge locations? Possibly replace the oak door jamb on the hinge side;

Re-Install missing original rusticated granite finial.

The newly formed John Muir Trail Foundation intends to raise several thousand dollars of funds for the needed re-pointing of the leaky stone roof, and some urgent repairs to the Dutch door at the entrance and the broken window. See <https://>



NPS's Thor Riksheim and Doug Harnsberger install the new Muir Shelter plaque

[johnmuirtrailfoundation.org/](http://johnmuirtrailfoundation.org/)  
National Park Service Superintendent Woody Smeck of Sequoia/Kings Canyon National Parks lauded the enterprise; he wrote to Harnsberger: “Thank you for your persistence in seeing this project through to completion. It's a fitting tribute to Muir and all that the Club has accomplished to protect the mountains.” ~

--Vicky Hoover

**The Next meeting of the California/Nevada Wilderness Committee is scheduled for February 16 and 17, 2019, in Shoshone, CA—annual joint meeting with CA/NV Desert Committee.**

The Sierra Club's California/Nevada Wilderness and Desert Committees will meet Saturday and Sunday, Feb. 16 and 17, 2019. Fun, networking, awesome insights on wild topics. Meet agency staff, meet the young SCA work crews. Happy hour and potluck dinner Sat. Scenic desert ambience; camp or accommodation nearby. All interested wildlands friends welcome. Contact Anne Henny: [anneth16@sbcglobal.net](mailto:anneth16@sbcglobal.net), or Terry Frewin: [terrylf09@gmail.com](mailto:terrylf09@gmail.com). (See Outing page for service projects before and after the Shoshone meeting.)

“The battle we have fought, and are still fighting . . . is a part of the eternal conflict between right and wrong, and we cannot expect to see the end of it.”

-- John Muir, Sierra Club Bulletin, January 1896



# Our Spontaneous Nevada Wilderness Trip

-- by Bruce Hamilton

This past August my wife Joan and I were scheduled to hike a stretch of the Pacific Crest Trail (PCT), from Tuolumne Meadows to Carson Pass. We planned each day carefully, including our meals, our hoped-for campsites, and our resupply spots. We booked lodging at beginning and end, and a shuttle. And then the fires of 2018 got much worse.

The day before we were to start, the Donnell Fire on Sonora Pass closed the highway and closed our stretch of the PCT. Our resupply site at Kennedy Meadows was closed and evacuated. As we looked at the air quality map for the Sierra Nevada, much of our planned route was scarlet--meaning unhealthy air.

So we looked at an air quality map of the West. The only green, or good quality, air appeared to be in Nevada. Since we had three weeks blocked off and 18 days of food packed, we switched plans and decided to go visit the Silver State.

But where would we hike? I had heard of the wonders of Nevada wilderness and, as Conservation Director, had helped to pass the Nevada Wilderness Act of 1989, but I had never been into any of the areas.

We went to REI in Berkeley,

but they had no maps or guidebooks to Nevada. So we jumped in the car and drove up I-80 to Reno, thinking the REI Reno store would help us figure out where to go. But the Reno store had no Nevada maps or guidebooks either. They offered information only about the Sierra Nevada. The clerk had never hiked in any Nevada wilderness areas. He suggested we go to the Forest Service headquarters in Sparks. Once we got there, they were out of maps, and the person behind the desk, new in the state, had no helpful information.

We had heard about the Ruby Mountains and the Jarbidge wildernesses, though, so we kept driving east to see what we could find. In Elko, we finally found a Forest Service office with maps of both places, and we planned two 3-day trips.

In the Ruby Mountains we took the Ruby Crest Scenic Trail south from Lamoille Canyon trailhead and found a great off-trail campsite away from some of the larger groups. The crowds were at Favre Lake where there was a horse party and a large private group of young adults, so we went off trail and camped above them at Castle Lake. We also climbed Wines Peak, just south of Favre Lake on the Ruby Crest Trail. The trail goes over the shoulder of the peak, and it is an easy walk-up. But we failed to see the Himalayan snowcocks that had been settled there from their Pakistani homeland. (It is the only place in the Western Hemisphere to spot this beautiful bird.) The views from the top were worth the climb, although it was hazy from the California fires. It turns out Nevada has only three air quality monitoring stations--in Reno, Las Vegas, and Elko, so the air quality map almost always looks green—a good joke on us.

Next we headed up 50 miles of dirt roads to the Idaho line to explore the Jarbidge Wilderness. This is Nevada's only original wilderness area--from 1964, when the Wilderness Act passed. Given the heat and dried-up creeks, we decided to head into the heart of the wilderness where the only



photo: Bruce Hamilton

Castle Lake in the Ruby Mountains Wilderness

two lakes, Jarbidge and Emerald Lakes, can be found. We took the Jarbidge River Trail that was said to be the most popular entrance, but we met only one day-hiker in three days in the backcountry. The weather and scenery did not disappoint, and the solitude was unmatched. There is even a Matterhorn Peak, although it was too hot and dry to try its long scree slope.

We then headed south to explore Great Basin National Park on the Utah line. The drive-in campgrounds were full of tourists who come to visit the Lehman Caves, with every cave tour sold out in advance every day. The short Bristlecone Pine loop trail is very popular, too, with trees aged up to 3,200 years. But the backcountry loop we tried--one day in and one day out-- was beautiful and wild, with few visitors. We camped at Johnson Lake, an historic mining site below Pyramid Peak. We also scaled lofty Wheeler Peak via a well-marked trail that goes from 10,200 to 13,065 feet with spectacular views across Nevada and western Utah.

We are sold on Nevada Wilderness and want to explore the central Nevada ranges, places like Arc Dome, but a little earlier in the season and with more advance planning. Thank you, Sierra Club and allies, for saving these wonderful areas for all of us. They are every bit as spectacular as the Sierra Nevada, but without all the people, advance permits, and smoke. ♪

(Bruce Hamilton, currently Sierra Club's deputy executive director, has been on staff since 1977. Joan Hamilton is former editor in chief of Sierra Magazine and now runs Audio Guides to the Outdoors, which produces audio guides to popular local parks like Mt. Diablo <https://audiblemountdiablo.com/audible-mount-diablo-3>)



photo: Bruce Hamilton

Hiking in the Jarbidge Wilderness

# World's oceans: only 13 percent still untouched wilderness

## "Paris agreement" for the ocean needed



The area of the world's ocean that remains undamaged by humans is tiny, according to the first ever comprehensive analysis of "marine wilderness".

Global shipping, fishing operations and pollution running into the sea from land have all taken their toll on the world's seas, including some of the most remote areas.

Areas of true wilderness are vital as they are some of the most diverse parts of the ocean and the last places on Earth still inhabited by sizeable numbers of large predators like sharks. Even the few fragments that remain are threatened as new fishing technologies and melting sea ice expose them to human activity.

Most of the remaining wilderness, which covers no more than 13 per cent of the world's oceans, can be found in the polar regions and around remote Pacific Island nations.

The research, published in the journal *Current Biology*, used available data on 19 different human impacts on oceans such as fertiliser pollution, as well

as fishing activities across the world.

The multi-national scientists defined ocean areas as wilderness if they were in the lowest 10 per cent of these impacts. Wide variation existed in the extent of human impacts, with 16 million square kilometres of wilderness remaining in the warm Indo-Pacific, but less than 2,000 square kilometres in temperate southern Africa.

Kendall Jones of the University of Queensland, who led the researchers, said they were astonished by just how little marine wilderness remains. "The ocean is immense, covering over 70 percent of our planet, but we've managed to significantly impact almost all of this vast ecosystem," he said. "Thanks to a warming climate, even some places that were once safe due to year-round ice cover can now be fished."

The report about the new international study on oceans appeared end of July, 2018, in the British "Independent" <https://www.independent.co.uk/>, as written by Josh Gabbatiss, Independent Science Correspondent.

### Ocean protections sought

Crucially, less than 5 per cent of the remaining wilderness is officially protected. "This means the vast majority of marine wilderness could be lost at any time, as advances in technology allow us to fish deeper and ship farther than ever before," explained Mr Jones.

Efforts are being made to protect some of the remaining wilderness regions, such as the push to create the world's largest marine sanctuary in Antarctica.

The authors of the study called for international recognition of the unique value of these wilderness zones and backed international efforts to protect the oceans, such as the "Paris agreement for the ocean" currently being negotiated by the United Nations, which would be a legally binding commitment under the existing Law of the Sea Convention. ∞

(Adapted from Independent, July 26, 2018).

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.

Co-Chair, north: Anne Henny, SF Bay Chapter (510) 289-2294  
 Co-Chair, south: Sandra Cattell, Angeles Chapter (661) 714-2850  
 Judy Anderson (818) 248-0402: wilderness management  
 Victoria Brandon (707) 994-1931: Redwood Chapter coordinator  
 Joyce Burk (760) 252-3820: Southern CA forests  
 Cindy Buxton (619) 934-0323: San Diego Chapter coordinator  
 Alan Carlton (510) 769-3403: Forest Planning liaison  
 Joanne Clarke (209) 233-7380: Tehipite Chapter coordinator  
 Larry Dwyer (775) 786-8564: Toiyabe Chapter coordinator  
 Steve Evans (916) 442-3155: Wild & Scenic Rivers  
 Steve Fernald (530) 577-5112: Tahoe area coordinator  
 Joe Fontaine (661) 821-2055: Wilderness Watch, Kern Kaweah Ch.  
 Cal French (805) 239-7338: Santa Lucia Chapter coordinator  
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Nature is made to conspire with spirit to emancipate us.  
 -- Ralph Waldo Emerson