

10 CALIFORNIA'S *Most Threatened Wild Places* 2005



Hoover Wilderness Additions



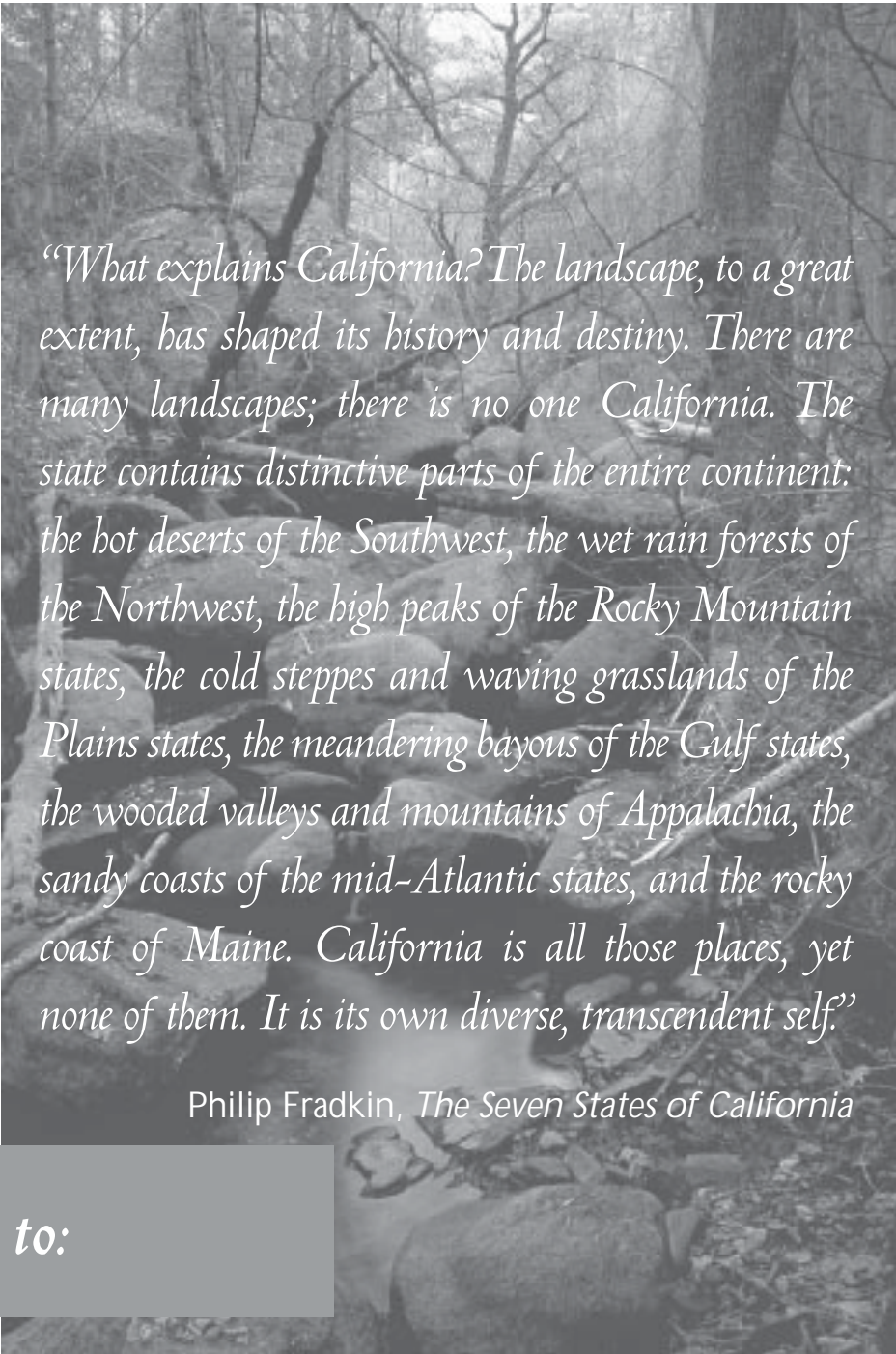
Klamath River Basin



Mojave National Preserve



Los Padres National Forest



“What explains California? The landscape, to a great extent, has shaped its history and destiny. There are many landscapes; there is no one California. The state contains distinctive parts of the entire continent: the hot deserts of the Southwest, the wet rain forests of the Northwest, the high peaks of the Rocky Mountain states, the cold steppes and waving grasslands of the Plains states, the meandering bayous of the Gulf states, the wooded valleys and mountains of Appalachia, the sandy coasts of the mid-Atlantic states, and the rocky coast of Maine. California is all those places, yet none of them. It is its own diverse, transcendent self.”

Philip Fradkin, *The Seven States of California*

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California Native Plant Society, Center for Biological Diversity, Environmental Protection Information Center, Friends of the Inyo, Klamath Basin Coalition, Klamath Forest Alliance, Northcoast Environmental Center, Resource Media, Sierra Club, Sierra Nevada Forest Protection Campaign, The Wilderness Society

*Front Cover: Hoover Wilderness Additions by Tim Forsell, Klamath River Basin courtesy of Klamath Basin Coalition, Mojave National Preserve courtesy of California Wilderness Coalition Archives, Los Padres National Forest courtesy of US Fish and Wildlife Service
Back Cover: Hoover Wilderness Additions by John Dittli, Owens Valley Wildlands by Nils Davis, Salmon River Watershed by Don Maddox*

OUR NATURAL HERITAGE AT RISK

California's 10 Most Threatened Wild Places

March 2005

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Executive Summary

Thirty six million people live in California; millions more come from all over the world to visit the state famous for its towering redwoods, dramatic rocky coastline, golden sand dunes, wildflower meadows, lush northwestern forests, and jagged, snow-clad peaks. While the Golden State was originally named for the 19th century quest to find gold in those mountains, California's most valuable resource has turned out to be its natural beauty.

The ten places listed in this report are some of the state's most valuable natural assets. For example, the two southern California national forests listed in this report are important retreats for millions of people in one of the most densely populated regions in North America. These forests also belong to one of the world's "biological hotspots," places that harbor such a rich diversity of species that their protection is crucial to the survival of biodiversity on Earth. Now, however, these forests are at risk of becoming dumping grounds for new roads, hydroelectric development, utility corridors and oil and gas drilling.

In the Klamath River Basin, once one of the world's most productive fisheries, and the Owens Valley, with its quiet beauty in the rain shadow of the eastern Sierra Nevada, water is being diverted and wildlife and landscapes are being left high and dry.

In the California desert's Algodones Dunes, Mojave National Preserve, and White Mountains, off-road vehicle special interest groups are mustering their political weight to undo protections of areas that had been officially closed to off-road vehicle use because of the damage such use would do to the unique values of those places.

In the Sierra Nevada and Cascade Mountains, the federal government is, under the auspices of fire prevention, accelerating its logging of thousands of acres of forests and engaging in short-sighted practices that, according to many fire experts, are both bad for the health of the forests and for the safety of surrounding communities.

However, it is important to remember that it is not too late for any one of these places. There are clear and viable solutions for every one of the ten areas on this list. In some cases, it means designating new wilderness; in other cases we simply urge government agencies to honor existing legal agreements and policies. If a planning or decision-making process is underway, we indicate how to best balance development and motorized recreation with conservation of some of the last best places in the state.

The ten places in this report represent ten opportunities to make decisions that could enrich the lives of generations to come, by safeguarding the ancient forests, the sun-baked canyons, the sweeping coasts, the last of the California condors and the Coho salmon so that our grandchildren may enjoy California's natural wonders as we do today. We can work together to help California continue to be its diverse, transcendent self.

2005 Ten Most Threatened Wild Places AT A GLANCE

Algodones Sand Dunes:

The largest dune ecosystem in the country, with waves of sand that crest up to 300 feet can be found in the southeastern corner of California. This "American Sahara" is home to species found nowhere else on earth including the imperiled Pierson's milkvetch, Algodones Dunes sunflower and the jewel-like Andrews dune scarab beetle.

Cleveland National Forest:

This is California's southernmost national forest, filled with flowering meadows, pine-covered ridges, stream-cut canyons, centuries-old pine forests, and oak and chaparral hillsides that change color with the seasons. It is a precious reservoir of open space for millions of southern Californians and refuge for more than 20 threatened and endangered plants and animals.

Los Padres National Forest:

This Central Coast wildland includes woodlands, grasslands, redwood forests, semi-desert and coastal landscapes that are home to 1,000 native plant and 500 animal species, including rambling black bears, graceful mountain lions and the largest soaring bird in North America, the California condor. Los Padres also has some of the most extraordinary native rock art to be found anywhere in the world.

Northern Sierra Nevada/Southern Cascades National Forests:

Part of John Muir's celebrated "Range of Light", these mountain ranges are a recreation hotspot, traversed by the world-famous Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail, and filled with mountain lakes and campgrounds that provide abundant opportunities for outdoor adventure. An exceptional variety of plants and animals live in these forests, including the California spotted owl, Sierra Nevada red fox, bald eagle, northern goshawk, American marten and Pacific fisher.

Owens Valley Wildlands:

The Owens Valley contains a mosaic of meadows, marshes, ponds, springs, woodlands, and desert creeks that are habitat for many plant and animals, including Tule elk, desert fish, nearly a dozen different kinds of birds and rare wildflowers. These lands are an important part of Owens Valley's recreation and ranching economy.



Mojave National Preserve

California Wilderness Coalition Archives

About This Report

2005 Ten Most Threatened Wild Places AT A GLANCE

Hoover Wilderness Additions:

Bordering Yosemite National Park and the Emigrant Wilderness, the Hoover Wilderness Addition is a relatively undiscovered Sierra gem. It is one of the most spectacular unprotected wild areas left in California. Within it are primeval forests, mountain meadows, soaring granite peaks and many different animals, including mountain lions, black bear, wolverines and mule deer. It is also a stronghold for two endangered amphibians: the Yosemite toad and the mountain yellow-legged frog.

White Mountains--Furnace Creek:

There is a ribbon of oasis in the arid White Mountains called Furnace Creek which is a life support system for an abundance of wildlife in the area including deer, hawks, mountain lions, bobcats and quail. Bird enthusiasts can glimpse flashes of color as yellow warblers, azure lazuli buntings and yellow-breasted chats and other colorful neo-tropical songbirds flit through the creek's huge gallery of cottonwoods, water birch thickets and marshes of cattails and sedge.

Klamath River:

This national ecological treasure originates in wetlands considered the "Everglades of the West," originally 350,000 acres of seasonal lakes, freshwater marshes and wet meadows. More than 400 animal species live in the region, including Rocky Mountain elk, pronghorn antelope and sage grouse and the largest wintering population of bald eagles in the continental United States.

Salmon River:

The Salmon River winds through one of the wildest regions in the continental United States and is renowned for its world-class whitewater rafting and kayaking. Salmon River also supports the largest remnant population of wild spring Chinook. Surrounding wildlands are filled with ancient forests, glacier-carved lakes, verdant meadows, crystal-clear streams and the greatest diversity of cone-bearing trees on the planet.

Mojave National Preserve and surrounding lands:

This is one of our country's newest national park units. Over 1,000 plants and animals can be found in its 1.6 million acres, including the nimble bighorn sheep, lumbering desert tortoise and eagles and hawks that soar overhead. The Preserve's wide-open vistas, numerous mountain ranges and canyons, Joshua Tree woodlands, cactus gardens, spring wildflower shows, "singing" sand dunes and extinct, volcanic cinder cones draw several hundred thousand visitors a year.



Hoover Wilderness Additions

John Dittl

The California Wilderness Coalition (CWC) represents 4,600 individuals and 200 businesses and conservation groups committed to protecting California's wild places. CWC has been a watchdog and ally for the Golden State's wildlands for 29 years, working with communities, policy-makers, activists, and scientists to conserve California's natural heritage.

This is the fourth in a series of annual reports spotlighting the ten wild places in the state that are in the greatest jeopardy of being damaged or destroyed. Every year, CWC's staff surveys, working with our partner conservation organizations, scientists and other wildland experts, review threatened wildlands throughout California. After careful analysis, the state's most threatened wild places are selected based on the following criteria:

Urgency and severity of threat: Does the problem pose an immediate threat to an area? What is the severity of the threat? Will the damage be permanent? Will it cause permanent damage or significantly degrade the area over time?

Significance: What is the ecological and cultural significance of the area? Is it a unique and/or biologically important landscape in California? Does the area contain animals or plants threatened with extinction?

Updates from last year:

Several places in this report are carried over from the 2004 report because they are still seriously imperiled. There was a success story from last year's list: Local conservationists were able to thwart the logging proposal that had placed the Golden Trout Wilderness Additions at risk and put it on our list in 2004. The old growth trees of Duncan Canyon in the Tahoe National Forest, which was on the 2003 10 Most Threatened list, was also saved last year. Logging in the roadless area was barred by a federal judge. However, several others from the 2004 list are not quite out of harm's way so we are keeping an eye on:

- **Giant Sequoia National Monument:** The threat of mismanagement of the monument through logging and other activities continues. Conservationists recently filed suit to protect the area
- **Medicine Lake Highlands:** The area is still currently threatened by geothermal development. Conservationists have challenged this proposed development in court.
- **Tejon Ranch:** The future of the ranch is still uncertain, but conservationists are working hard to preserve its natural integrity.

Algodones Sand Dunes

Outstanding Values

The Algodones Dunes are made up of cresting waves of sand that rise up to 300 feet in the southeastern corner of California. Spread over 40 miles long and five miles wide, this sea of sand is the largest dune ecosystem in the country. Called the “American Sahara”, the Algodones Dunes have been designated a National Natural Landmark.

While this dramatic and unique landscape looks like an enormous sand sculpture, it is full of life. Clusters of mesquite shrubs, paloverde and smoke trees gather on the dunes’ slopes. Wildlife, such as the threatened desert tortoise, flat-tailed horned lizard, and Colorado desert fringe-toed lizard can also be found in these sandy reaches. Algodones is home to species found nowhere else on earth including the imperiled Pierson’s milkvetch, Algodones Dunes sunflower and the jewel-like Andrews dune scarab beetle. This landscape offers opportunities for birdwatching, wildflower viewing as well as unique camping and hiking adventures.

Because of the area’s extraordinary values, the California Desert Protection Act of 1994 designated a 25,800-acre North Algodones Dunes Wilderness. Unfortunately, while this was an important new designation, this protected less than 15 percent of the dunes, providing too little protection for dune species.

America’s largest dune ecosystem is to be reopened to off-road vehicle crowds of up to 240,000.

Threats

The dunes’ imperiled plants and wildlife have been under increased assault by off-road vehicle (ORV) riders. Now more than one million riders visit the dunes a year, and the crowds that gather on busy weekends, sometimes as many as 240,000 riders, overwhelm the agency’s ability to manage for public safety. During weekends and holidays, crowds mob the dunes, sometimes resulting in fatal gun battles, stabbings, high speed collisions and even attacks on agency employees. On such occasions, the BLM has to bring in personnel from other agencies, such as the National Park Service, Forest Service, and even the Border Patrol to help reduce outbreaks of violence and fatal accidents. Given this demanding task, federal agencies have little time left over to protect fragile plants and animals.

In 2000, the Bureau of Land Management signed a legal agreement between three conservation groups and five ORV groups that left the most popularly used 70,000 acres open to ORV use and closed 49,300 acres of sensitive dune habitat to motorized travel. The agreement provided ample opportunities for ORV recreation while upholding the agency’s conservation and multiple-use responsibilities. The agency then proceeded to develop a longer term management plan.



Andrew Harvey

Nonetheless, in 2003 the BLM reversed the 2000 legal agreement and proposed reopening all of the dunes to ORVs except for the small wilderness that was already protected back in 1994. Conservationists countered with lawsuits that forced the BLM to adhere to the 2000 closures until its release of a management plan that would comply with the Endangered Species Act and other federal environmental laws.

In January of this year, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service signed off on the BLM's management plan to open the dunes to ORV use, despite earlier assertions that such a plan may jeopardize the continued existence of the threatened Pierson's milkvetch.

Solution

ORV use is just one type of recreation that, in addition to jeopardizing Algodones' plants and animals, also precludes the enjoyment of several other types of recreation. The use and management of the area needs to be balanced so that the widest spectrum of public users can enjoy this globally unique location. The designation of the South Algodones Dunes Wilderness and expansion of the North Algodones Dunes Wilderness strikes this balance by leaving 70,000 acres or 50% of Algodones open to ORV use while setting aside other areas for wildlife and plant protection and several types of low-impact recreation. Additionally, the BLM should develop a new management plan that only permits a level of ORV use that the BLM can safely manage.

Conservationists have advocated for the permanent protection of the now-closed 49,300 acres as a new South Algodones Dunes Wilderness and in addition to the existing North Algodones Dunes Wilderness. This would protect the wildest, highest, and most remote part of the dunes and lands that the Bureau of Land Management had already identified as having wilderness potential.

It would also codify a balanced solution that makes room for everybody. Dune visitors could enjoy different parts of the dunes in a variety of ways. Without this additional layer of protection, off-road vehicle use could become the dominant use of the area, precluding other types of enjoyment and recreation.

Each year, over one million raucous off-road vehicles tear through the fragile sands of the Algodones Dunes east of San Diego. The huge crowds damage the local ecosystem, poison the air, and threaten public safety.



California Wilderness Coalition Archives

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White Mountains-Furnace Creek

Outstanding Values

There is a ribbon of oasis in the arid White Mountains called Furnace Creek. This meandering stream is shaded by mature cottonwoods and as a living creek system, is always changing. It is a life support system for an abundance of wildlife in the area including deer, hawks, mountain lions, bobcats and quail. Bird enthusiasts can glimpse flashes of color as yellow warblers, azure lazuli buntings and yellow-breasted chats and other colorful neo-tropical songbirds flit through the creek's huge gallery of cottonwoods, water birch thickets and marshes of cattails and sedge. As it is, in essence, the local watering hole, the health of this stream community is tied directly to the health of regional desert wildlife.

Threats

While any semblance of a road in Furnace Creek washed out in the early 1980s, a handful of vehicles have been trespassing into this rare desert wetland every year. All terrain vehicles, jeeps and motorcycles have punched through the creek and crashed through trees, bushes and bogs, leaving muddy tracks in their wake.

Because of the obvious damage done to this fragile desert habitat, the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management closed this area to motorized travel to protect its unique values. The agencies now propose to reverse their decision to protect Furnace Creek and actually build a new road through this rare desert oasis in violation of federal and state laws designed to protect critical desert wetlands.

In addition to sacrificing the creek's health and beauty, the Forest Service is also creating a management headache as the agency itself acknowledges any road they build through Furnace Creek will naturally "wash out time and time again." Due to the narrow nature of the canyon, the only place to build any new road or trail is directly through Furnace Creek.

"There seems little question that Gifford Pinchot's guiding land use philosophy of 'the greatest good for the greatest number over the longest period of time' could only be best served by retention of the status quo. . .to do otherwise would only serve the interests of very few people over a short period of time."

– Phil Pister, Executive Secretary of the Desert Fishes Council

Furnace Creek is home for many creatures including deer, hawks, mountain lions, bobcats and quail. Creeks here are being damaged by illegal off-road vehicle trails.



California Wilderness Coalition Archives

Solution

There are thousands of other places to drive but only one Furnace Creek where deer can drink, birds feed and nest and countless aquatic animals live. Protecting this creek is legally mandated by several federal and state laws. Allowing a small minority of off-road vehicle users to run roughshod over decades of scientifically-based land management regulations prioritizing the preservation of dwindling desert wetlands is neither sensible nor balanced.

The BLM and Forest Service should keep Furnace Creek closed to mechanized travel. There are over 5,500 miles of roads in the Inyo National Forest and the closure of Furnace Creek would only affect less than four miles or .0001% of the roads in the Forest. It would also protect this unique, fragile and ecologically critical resource for wider public enjoyment and area wildlife.

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Mojave National Preserve

Outstanding Values

The 1.6 million acre Mojave National Preserve is one of our country's newest national parks, established just over a decade ago by the California Desert Protection Act. This extraordinary landscape and the adjacent Soda Mountains and Cady Mountains Proposed Wildernesses are at the very heart of the Mojave Desert. This is home for over 1,000 plants and animals including the nimble bighorn sheep, lumbering desert tortoise and eagles and hawks that soar overhead. The springtime wildflower shows can be magical, adding unexpected color to the preserve's cactus gardens, sand dunes and Joshua tree woodlands. The preserve's wide-open vistas, numerous mountain ranges and canyons, "singing" sand dunes and extinct, volcanic cinder cones draw several hundred thousand visitors a year. The preserve also has many artifacts and sites that chronicle the earlier presence of the Mojave and Chemehuevi tribes.

"Why is the County spending limited resources pursuing new roads in a unit of the National Park System while so many roads elsewhere in the county are in need of repair? There are so many dirt roads here in the Preserve. In fact, when you are on top of a mountain looking over the land, you wonder why there are so many. It would be a disastrous mistake to open up all those tiny dirt tracks and wash bottoms."

-Adrienne Knute, longtime landowner in Mojave National Preserve, in a letter to San Bernardino County Supervisor Bill Postmus.

Threats

A provision from an antiquated 19th century mining law, the Lode Mining Act, is being resurrected by an anti-conservation minority in an attempt to carve up the park with up to 2,500 miles of new roads. There are already nearly 300 miles of maintained roads in the park, along with several hundred more miles of open backcountry routes, providing ample public, emergency and landowner access. In a resolution from 2001, the San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors, with the support of off-road vehicle special interest groups, claimed that this outdated law gives them the wherewithal to widen and pave trails, cow paths, dry streambeds and extinct mining roads into modern highways.

The establishment of the preserve was meant to confine vehicle use to areas where it is appropriate and to protect several hundred thousand acres of fragile and unroaded portions of the preserve as wilderness. Unless properly managed, vehicles can cause air pollution, rip into fragile desert soils, create visual blight, destroy archaeological sites, flatten sensitive plant communities, and facilitate poaching, weed invasion and trash dumping.

Unfortunately, this threat is not confined to Mojave National Preserve. Since the 1980s, anti-conservation special interest groups have been using this outdated mining law to try and undo the protection of parks and wilderness throughout the West. In California alone, groups, individuals, and local governments have asserted over 5,500 miles of road claims on sites that are now wildlife trails, creek beds, and hiking and equestrian routes in our national parks, national forests, and BLM lands.

Solution

The Mojave National Preserve does not need more roads; this natural haven needs to be protected, flanked as it is by Los Angeles and Las Vegas, two of the fastest growing metropolitan areas in the country. The law being invoked by the county may have been practical in the 19th century but in the 21st century it is being absurdly applied to create a land grab that could destroy an important part of our national heritage.

The Bush administration should not legitimize these fraudulent claims and the San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors should withdraw their thousands of miles of bogus claims. There are modern, legal mechanisms that could be used to pursue the establishment of truly necessary roads and highways in the West. Furthermore, this move by San Bernardino County and off-road special interests would place an untenable financial burden on the county for new road maintenance.

Senator Barbara Boxer and Representative Hilda Solis have proposed permanent protection of the 110,000-acre Soda Mountains and the 92,000-acre Cady Mountains Proposed Wildernesses which neighbor the park to the west. This would expand the low-impact recreational opportunities and wildlife habitat available in and around Mojave National Preserve.

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Cleveland National Forest

Outstanding Values

The 434,000-acre Cleveland National Forest is the southernmost national forest in California and a precious reservoir of open space and ecological diversity. It stretches from within five miles of the Mexican border northward 90 miles into Orange and Riverside Counties.

From flowering meadows, pine-covered ridges, stream-cut canyons harboring mountain lion, bobcat, mule deer, badger and coyote, to centuries-old pine forests and oak and chaparral hillsides that change color with the seasons, this forest is the last bastion of natural beauty, open space and tranquility for millions of people in the midst of crowded southern California. It also is the last refuge for many species of plants and wildlife in the region, providing sanctuary to more than 20 threatened and endangered plants and animals.

The Cleveland National Forest is divided into three separate districts in accordance with the forest's three mountain ranges: the Santa Ana, Palomar and Laguna (or Cuyamaca). Elevations on the forest span between 400 and 6,300 feet. There is still a great deal of wild land in the Cleveland, including over 88,000 roadless acres. Some of southern California's most remote places are in the southern portion of the Cleveland National Forest.

Threats

The fragmentation of the forest into three distinct sections makes it more vulnerable to threats. For one, it reduces the amount of wildlife habitat and breaks it up into disconnected pieces. The northernmost part of the Cleveland, the Trabuco District, is the most threatened area anywhere in the four southern California national forests.

This part of the Santa Ana Mountains is becoming an island of open space in a sea of sprawl. Heavily developed Orange County is pressing against the forest's western border and fast-growing Riverside County is creeping in from the east.

Riverside and Orange Counties are both evaluating plans for a multi-lane toll road through the Cleveland to connect the two counties. Proposed routes would cut into some of most pristine areas in the Santa Ana Mountains and potentially wipe out homes in neighboring canyons, while dumping traffic onto Orange County's already congested coastal community streets. These proposed routes would increase regional air pollution and run-off to Orange County's coastal waters, scar scenic vistas, impair the movement of wildlife, and promote sprawl in Riverside County.

San Diego Gas and Electric is proposing to build massive 500,000-volt power lines through roadless areas in the Santa Ana Mountains adjacent to the San Mateo Wilderness. These new utilities would block wildlife access and increase the likelihood of accidental fire, poaching, and illegal off-road vehicle use. Last year, this project received initial approval from the California Public Utility Commission. Congressman Darrell Issa has attached legislation to the federal energy bill, currently being championed by the Bush administration, to establish an easement for those transmission lines and preempt future opposition to the project from the public and Forest Service.

The Elsinore Valley Municipal Water District and a Nevada corporation want to build a hydroelectric power plant that would drown beautiful and wild Morrell Canyon, a proposed wilderness area adjacent to the existing San Mateo Wilderness. Water from Morrell Canyon flows into the ecologically important



From flowering meadows, pine-covered ridges, stream-cut canyons to centuries-old pine forests and oak and chaparral hillsides, this forest is the last bastion of natural beauty, open space and tranquility for millions of people in the midst of crowded southern California. Proposals from surrounding counties for a freeway, powerlines, and a power plant would cut into some of most pristine areas and damage wildlife habitat.

Andrew Harvey

San Juan Creek, home to the endangered arroyo toad and rare plants. The project would degrade water quality in San Juan Creek, impacting ranches, homes and wildlife.

Solution

The Forest Service is currently completing its management plans for the southern California national forests, including the Cleveland. These plans could be intelligently designed to protect the forest from many of these development threats. Supporters of the Cleveland National Forest are working to encourage the Forest Service to create a management plans that will fulfill the agency's responsibility to protect the forest's special places for future generations.

Senator Barbara Boxer and Representative Hilda Solis are championing legislation for new wilderness areas in the Cleveland National Forest as part of a larger California Wild Heritage Act. This legislation would ensure the protection of this world-class landscape for future generations and prevent these public lands from becoming a de facto dumping ground for development.

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Los Padres National Forest

Outstanding Values

The Los Padres National Forest is an irreplaceable haven for outdoor adventure and a source of clean drinking water for millions of coastal and Central Valley residents. Los Padres stretches for almost 220 miles from north to south and its 1.75 million acres reach into San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, Ventura, Kern, and Monterey counties. Its woodlands, grasslands, redwood forests, semi-desert and coastal landscapes are home to 1,000 native plant and 500 animal species, including the little arroyo toad, rambling black bears, graceful mountain lions and the largest soaring bird in North America, the California condor. Los Padres also has some of the most extraordinary native rock art to be found anywhere in the world including pictographs created by the Chumash Indians and many other prehistoric and historic Native American sites.

Threats

In October 2001, the U.S. Forest Service released a proposal to expand oil and gas leasing on the Los Padres National Forest. The proposal reviewed 140,000 acres for oil and gas development, including proposed wilderness areas, Native American archeological and cultural sites, popular horse packing and backpacking trails, and habitat for twenty imperiled plants and animals including the endangered California condor.

Tens of millions of dollars have already been poured into condor recovery to bring the bird back from the brink of extinction but the success of the program has been thwarted as condors have collided with power lines, soaked in oil, been poisoned by lead bullets and died from eating trash. There are only 44 wild condors in the forest and

"It is irresponsible for us to be drilling in our roadless, wild lands when it will yield only one day's worth of oil supply for the nation. The costs of the Administration's proposal far outweigh the benefits of increased oil and gas production."

-Jeanette Weber, Managing Partner, Santa Barbara Hotel Group

biologists are worried that new oil and gas leasing in one of its last best homes could continue to sabotage the bird's recovery. The destruction of wildlife, recreational opportunities, cultural resources and the forest's natural beauty is a high price to pay for a potentially low return: Drilling in these areas offers no real energy solution, providing at most a one-day supply of energy for the nation. The Fish and Wildlife Service is expected to release its biological opinion of the oil and gas leasing proposal by February 2005 and the Forest Service's final report on this project is slated for release shortly thereafter.

Another looming threat to Los Padres' roadless wildlands is the Forest Service's failure to protect those areas from new road construction and off-road vehicle (ORV) use despite the existence of several hundred miles of ORV roads and trails. Indeed, under their draft management plan, 24 roadless areas would be vulnerable to the destructive impacts of ORV use.

Solution

Senators Barbara Boxer and Dianne Feinstein and Representatives Lois Capps and Sam Farr have all expressed their concern about the proposed drilling. In February 2004 Representatives Capps and Farr introduced legislation to halt any new oil and gas leasing, a move supported by the mayor of Santa Barbara and other local elected officials, fishing groups, tourism businesses and the Chumash tribe.

Senator Barbara Boxer and Representative Hilda Solis are championing legislation that would preserve most of the lands being considered for oil and gas development by protecting new wilderness areas as part of a California Wild Heritage Act.



US Fish & Wildlife Service

Drilling threatens the Los Padres National Forest, home to the endangered California Condor.

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Hoover Wilderness Additions

Outstanding Values

Bordering Yosemite National Park and the Emigrant Wilderness, the Hoover Wilderness Addition is a relatively undiscovered Sierra gem. It is one of the most spectacular unprotected wild areas left in California. Within it are primeval forests, mountain meadows and soaring granite peaks. This is home for many different animals, including mountain lions, black bear, wolverines and mule deer. It is also a stronghold for two endangered amphibians: the Yosemite toad and the mountain yellow-legged frog. Horseback riders, hunters, anglers, backpackers and wildland outfitters enjoy the many opportunities for outdoor adventure: there are more than 30 lakes for fishing and backcountry recreation, twelve miles of the Pacific Crest Trail traverse its slopes. The West Walker River and Walker Lake also provide good fishing opportunities.

Because the region is so rich in beauty and backcountry recreational opportunities, in 1986 the Forest Service recommended that this area be protected as wilderness. In keeping with that recommendation, the agency closed the wilderness addition to all motorized use to keep the area wild until Congress could act on the recommendation.

Threats

Loud, polluting snowmobilers ignored the closure and started trespassing into the Hoover Wilderness Addition, shattering the peace, churning up the soil, destroying plant habitat and splashing through the headwaters of West Walker River and Walker Lake. Once the word spread that the Forest Service was not enforcing its long-standing closure, snowmobile use soared. Last spring, a crowd of snowmobilers roared into the Hoover Wilderness Additions and did not stop there; many of them kept going, extending their illegal trespass into Yosemite National Park, the Emigrant Wilderness and onto the Pacific Crest Trail. However, the Forest Service, rather than doing its job and upholding the law, buckled under the pressure of these renegade riders and has now proposed to officially open the Hoover Wilderness Addition to snowmobile use.

This is a troubling precedent; instead of upholding the law, the Forest Service is subverting its own authority and capitulating to the illegal snowmobilers, irrespective of the fact that this decision will ruin the area's wildness and tranquility and sabotage the protection of the area as wilderness.

"The Proposed Hoover Wilderness Additions are some of the most ruggedly beautiful wildlands in the American West. Until recently, the Forest Service had been protecting this area's abundant wilderness values fairly well. But legally opening this remote wild country to ear-splitting noise and exhaust would be heartbreakingly sad. This greater Yosemite wildland area is sacred to many, many people. We value it for its quiet grandeur."

-Dave Willis, Sierra Treks

Solution

The Forest Service has released a management plan which presents three management alternatives. The Forest Service should choose alternative B, which would protect the Hoover Wilderness Addition's beauty and solitude by maintaining the closure to mechanized vehicles.

The Forest Service should hold firm to its earlier recommendation that the highest and best use for this area is to protect it as wilderness. The agency should enforce the closure and protect the area's natural integrity until Congress acts upon the Forest Service's wilderness recommendation.

For More Information

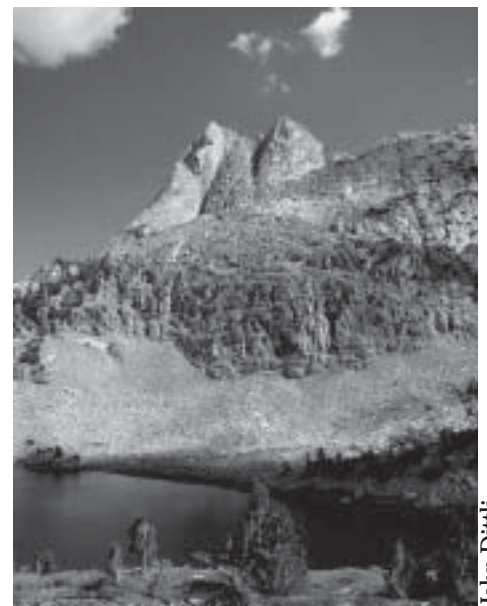
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The Hoover Wilderness Additions is one of the most spectacular unprotected wild areas left in California. The Forest Service has proposed to officially open the area to snowmobile use.



John Dittli

Northern Sierra Nevada and Southern Cascade national forests

Outstanding Values

This is the country John Muir celebrated as the “Range of Light.” Spanning the northern end of the Sierra Nevada and the southern tip of the Cascade mountain ranges, the Plumas, Lassen and the southeastern part of the Tahoe National Forests provide habitat for an exceptional variety of plants and animals, including the California spotted owl, Sierra Nevada red fox, bald eagle, northern goshawk, American marten and Pacific fisher. It is a recreation hotspot, traversed by the world-famous Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail, and filled with mountain lakes and woodlands that provide abundant opportunities for outdoor adventure.

Much of the old-growth forest in the region has disappeared over the past 150 years. This dramatic loss of habitat led to the decline of wildlife that depend on old-growth trees for their survival such as the California spotted owl, Pacific fisher and marten. These forests provide some of the last large, undeveloped swathes of habitat critical to the survival of many of these species. During that same period, fires were suppressed which resulted in an unnatural accumulation of fuel that has turned much of the region into a tinderbox.

Threats

In the 1990s, timber industry representatives, and community leaders and interests began holding talks in a library in Plumas County’s town of Quincy. This “Quincy Library Group” (QLG), as they were later called, developed a management plan for 2.5 million acres of the Lassen National Forest, Plumas National Forest, and the Sierraville Ranger District of the Tahoe National Forest. The QLG plan called for the cutting of a massive system of firebreaks and small clearcuts across the region to reduce the risk of fire to surrounding communities; though fire experts say this tactic tends to increase rather than reduce fire risk. The QLG plan became law as the Herger-Feinstein Quincy Library Group Forest Recovery Act.



California Wilderness Coalition Archives

The Plumas, Lassen and the southeastern part of the Tahoe National Forests provide some of the last large, undeveloped swathes of habitat critical to the survival of many species.

Since the Forest Service began implementing the QLG plan, it has proposed over 20 logging projects, some of which are truly gargantuan in size and destroy a substantial amount of habitat for the California spotted owl and other vulnerable creatures without reducing fire hazards. Even the Forest Service had concluded that fully implementing the QLG project “could pose a serious risk to the viability of the [California spotted] owl in the planning area,” while the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service similarly concluded that the QLG project “poses a significant threat to the long-term viability of the California spotted owl, Pacific fisher, and American marten due to the loss, degradation, and fragmentation of suitable habitat.” For example, the misleadingly named “Creeks Forest Health Recovery” project is planned miles away from any community where “forest health recovery” is needed and will result in the logging of over 11,000 acres, much of which is old-growth forest.

“The removal of fire resistant trees and the creation of logging slash by clear cutting. . . are entirely contrary to the Project’s stated goals of fire risk reduction. . . In order to better protect people and property from fire, thorough treatment of the home ignition zone (the home itself and the area up to 200’ surrounding it) is the only effective approach.”

-Dennis C. Odion, Ph.D., Research Biologist
University of California, Santa Barbara

California Wilderness Coalition Archives



The Forest Service has proposed over 20 logging projects, some of which are truly gargantuan in size and destroy a substantial amount of habitat for the California spotted owl and other vulnerable creatures without reducing fire hazards.

wildlife habitat and proposed wilderness areas in the region are protected.

In 2004, the Bush administration undid much of the Framework and released a revision that would triple logging in the region and destroy wildlife habitat and drive vulnerable species closer to extinction. Reinstating the Framework’s original provisions offers the best way to protect and restore forest ecosystem health in the Range of Light.

At the community level, Fire Safe Councils, broad-based public/private partnerships are forming to mobilize Californians to protect their homes and communities through education and action programs. Conservationists are participating in these hands-on efforts in local communities and advocating for solutions such as promoting the use of prescribed fire to treat fuels and increase the fire resiliency of forest communities.

Solution

Realizing the flawed science and likely ineffectiveness of the QLG plan, the Forest Service, Senator Feinstein and other decisionmakers agreed that the 2001 Sierra Nevada Framework should apply to the western remainder of the region that had been under the Quincy Library Group’s purview.

The 2001 Sierra Nevada Framework, which directs management of 11.5 million acres of California’s national forest lands, represents over a decade of research, planning and cooperative efforts by the Forest Service, scientists, community activists, business owners, and conservationists. The Framework’s goals are to reduce the wildfire threat to communities, while protecting forests, wildlife, and water quality. It sets out clear limitations on the areas and size of trees that can be removed so that logging is sustainable and

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Owens Valley Wildlands



Nils Davis

Owens Valley contains a mosaic of meadows, marshes, ponds, springs, woodlands, and desert creeks. As the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP) continues to pump more water out of the region, more meadows and wetlands are disappearing.

Outstanding Values

In the rain shadow of the dramatic eastern Sierra Nevada, the Owens Valley contains a mosaic of meadows, marshes, ponds, springs, woodlands, and desert creeks; it is one of the largest such habitat complexes in the arid Great Basin.

These wildlands are habitat for many plant and animals, including tule elk, desert fish, nearly a dozen different kinds of birds and rare wildflowers. These lands are also important to Owens Valley's recreation and ranching economy. They support livestock grazing, fishing, hunting, exceptional birding, and other recreational opportunities.

Threats

The infamous "Chinatown" history of the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP) "buying" Owens River in the early 1900s, draining Owens Lake and destroying local agriculture, is relatively well known. The untold story is that the Owens Valley's groundwater-dependent landscape continued to thrive despite the water grab. Thrived, that is, until 1972, when LADWP enlarged its aqueduct and started pumping more and more groundwater out of the region.

Inyo County and local conservation groups sued LADWP for its excessive groundwater pumping, starting nearly two decades of ongoing litigation and negotiation. Finally, in 1991, LADWP signed a landmark agreement with Inyo County that was a win for all parties: it provides LADWP with a reliable water supply and the agency, in turn, committed to restoring damaged wildlands and preventing future damage.

Yet, fourteen years later, little has changed. LADWP continues to pump more and more water, failing to repair past damages and, instead, more meadows and wetlands are disappearing. This "desertification" is turning the area into tumbleweeds and dust even while LADWP is being forced to spend

millions to reduce the dust pollution blowing off the now-dry Owens Lake. In fact, LADWP is pumping even more groundwater than it was when it caused the original damage to these lands. Yet the agency plans to increase its pumping even more.

Solution

LADWP must be held accountable to the legally binding agreement it made in 1991, the Inyo-LA Long Term Water Agreement, and stop forcing Inyo County to spend its limited resources on litigation. Southern California residents, especially LADWP ratepayers, have the power to insist that the agency honor that agreement and protect this special landscape for future generations before it literally dries up and blows away.

"Humans have lived in Owens Valley for over 10,000 years, but in my lifetime I've seen tules turned into dust."

-Harry Williams, former Council member of the Bishop Paiute Tribe.

Klamath River Basin

Outstanding Values

The Klamath River stretches more than 250 miles from southern Oregon to the Pacific Coast of northern California. The river originates in wetlands considered the "Everglades of the West," originally 350,000 acres of seasonal lakes, freshwater marshes and wet meadows. The Klamath River Basin is a national ecological treasure with its extraordinary plant diversity and variety of landscapes, including steep mountains and canyons, high desert, and lush rainforests, and salmon spawning streams. More than 400 animal species live in the region, including Rocky Mountain elk, pronghorn antelope and sage grouse. Most of the wetlands are managed as National Wildlife Refuges and support 263 bird species, including the largest wintering population of bald eagles in the continental United States. The refuges provide a critical stopover along the Pacific Flyway with nearly 90% of migrating birds visiting the area.

Threats

In 1907, the federal government drained 79% of the Upper Klamath Basin's wetlands to convert the regional desert into farmland. The resulting series of massive irrigation projects damaged this healthy landscape and took a toll on resident plants and animals. It also increased the regional demand for water far beyond what was available and set the stage for future battles among fishing, tribal, environmental and agricultural interests. A series of droughts starting in the 1990s made these tensions even worse.

Excessive agricultural diversions, hydroelectric dams, unsustainable logging and road building have imperiled fish in the Klamath and left the National Wildlife Refuges in the region without enough water for the majority of the past twelve years. Coho salmon, once abundant in the Klamath, are now down to about 3% of their historic numbers. Downriver sports fisheries, whitewater recreation and commercial salmon fisheries have been devastated by poor water quality and destruction of fish habitat, costing the region at least 4,000 family-wage jobs and \$80 million a year in economic benefits.

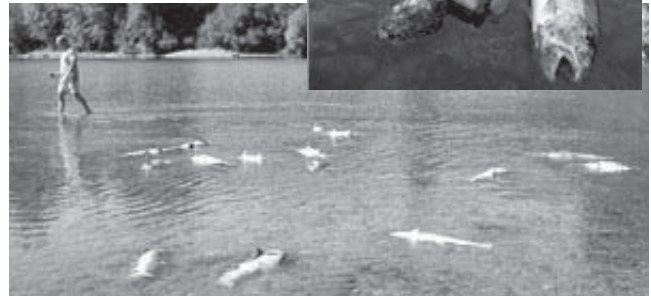
In July 2003, a U.S. District Court declared the federal government's Klamath Project water plan to be in violation of the Endangered Species Act because of its failure to protect threatened coho salmon. Meanwhile, the Forest Service has intensified its logging at lower elevations in the Klamath Basin, which will threaten yet more wild salmon spawning and rearing areas and designated Wild and Scenic river corridors.

The Klamath's chinook salmon population is now so depleted that the 2005 California salmon fishing season will likely be cut in half to protect the few Klamath chinook that remain. This will result in a \$100 million loss in profit to California's salmon fishing fleet and substantially higher prices for customers at the fish counter.

"Be it Resolved that the California-Nevada Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church affirms the restoration of the Klamath River water flows necessary to support a healthy river ecosystem which includes healthy runs of salmon and steelhead for the downstream communities.

-Resolution of the California-Nevada Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church, adopted May 14, 2003

Excessive agricultural diversions, hydroelectric dams, unsustainable logging and road building have caused fish kills. Coho salmon, once abundant in the Basin, are now so rare they are federally protected under the Endangered Species Act.



Klamath Basin Coalition

Solution

In 2002, Representatives Mike Thompson (D-CA) and Earl Blumenauer (D-OR), in an attempt to find solutions to problems in the Klamath, introduced in Congress the "Klamath River Basin Restoration Act to buy out water rights from willing sellers, boost river flows and aid communities hurt by the salmon kill.

More recently, Senators Barbara Boxer and Dianne Feinstein and Congressman Thompson have introduced the Northern California Coastal Wild Heritage Wilderness Act in the Senate and House that would designate wilderness areas and salmon restoration areas in parts of the Klamath basin. The bill recently passed the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, and Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger is supporting the bill.

The licenses of the five federal hydropower dams in the Klamath are all up for renewal by March 2006 through the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC). This creates a once-in-a-lifetime window of opportunity to improve the government's stewardship of the Klamath watershed, help restore economically important fish populations and protect the National Wildlife Refuges. A draft Environmental Impact Statement on the relicensing will be released in mid-2005, providing the public with an important opportunity to support/advocate for dam decommissioning and the full restoration of one of the west's most important rivers.

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Salmon River Watershed

Outstanding Values

The Salmon River winds through one of the wildest regions in the continental United States and is renowned for its world-class whitewater rafting and kayaking. Its cool waters are one of the last refuges for the imperiled green sturgeon, an ancient fish once ubiquitous along the west coast. The Salmon River also supports the largest remnant population of wild spring Chinook, now blocked by dams from their spawning grounds in the upper Klamath Basin. This early-spawning race of salmon, fed the tribal peoples of the whole Klamath basin – including the Karuk of the Salmon River – for tens of thousands of years. As the last major undammed, undiverted tributary of the Klamath River, the Salmon is a critical source of cold, clean water without which the already imperiled salmon and steelhead trout populations of the Klamath River might well collapse.

This high-quality watershed benefits from its origins in the Trinity Alps, Russian, and Marble Mountain wilderness areas and several unprotected roadless lands that merit wilderness protection. These wildlands are filled with ancient forests, glacier-carved lakes, verdant meadows, crystal-clear streams and the greatest diversity of cone-bearing trees on the planet. The famous Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail winds through the area and takes visitors to some of the most outstanding viewpoints in the region.

Threats

While the Salmon River benefits from neighboring wilderness and roadless lands, it also runs through public forestlands that have been badly managed. Intensive logging has converted deep, old-growth conifer forests into fire-prone hardwood trees and brush. Roads and clearcuts have triggered landslides that have degraded the river's water quality. The river's fish habitat is threatened today by 'recreational' gold miners. The miners use suction dredges that are essentially giant, floating vacuum cleaners that suck up gravel and sand, harming spawning beds and the deep holes which provide cool-water refuges in hot summer months. The numbers of returning spring chinook this past year were catastrophically low, perhaps the lowest in thirty years.

The National Academy of Sciences has called for restrictions on logging near the cool streams that feed the Salmon River, stating "it is likely that land-use activities in the Salmon River watershed have had the

"We can't exist without our fish."

-Leaf Hillman, Vice-Chairman of the Karuk, whose 3,300 members make up the second-largest tribe in California, quoted in the Washington Post, 1/30/05



Don Maddox

largest adverse effects on production of salmon and steelhead in the Salmon River Basin." Nonetheless, the Forest Service has pushed more destructive logging projects that will liquidate most of the old-growth forest near the river's corridor.

The greatest current threats are the Knob and Meteor timber sales, which would destabilize the steep slopes above both the north and south forks of the Salmon River. Together, these logging projects would cut over 14 million board feet (roughly enough to fill 2,800 log-trucks). Such extreme logging has been encouraged by the Bush administration's elimination of environmental protections for roadless areas, streamside areas and old growth forest habitat.

Solution

The health and integrity of this watershed needs to be restored in accordance with the Karuk tribe's traditional landscape management practices. Their strategies include clearing out the brushy build-up in the forest's understory, applying controlled burns and stopping old-growth logging. The local support which has been provided for the past 12 years by the Salmon River Restoration Council is also key to the watershed's future.

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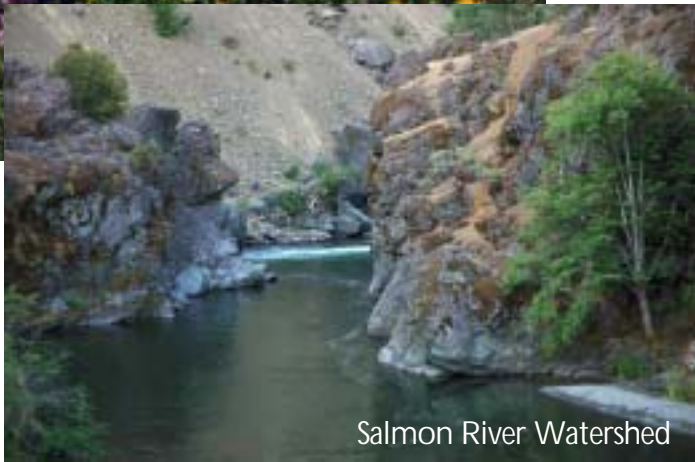
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Hoover Wilderness Additions



Owens Valley Wildlands



Salmon River Watershed



California Wilderness Coalition

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