



WORDS OF *the* WILD

Vol. XXVII, No. 3 December 2024

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

Biden Administration and national monuments

The campaign to protect Sattitla reaches a critical milestone

Time is short to achieve a new national monument

-- by Mary Lunetta

Note: WOW has regularly featured national monument campaigns--most recently, the Chuckwalla--still maybe possible by end of this year; this is our first description of Sattitla--now in the limelight!

The land known as Sattitla, often called the "headwaters of California," lies within the Shasta-Trinity, Klamath, and Modoc National Forests in northern California. Spanning some 200,000 acres, this remarkable landscape features lava flows, lakes, ice caves, and sugar pine forests. It also has one of California's most vital water systems, where volcanically formed aquifers provide clean water--essential to people, agriculture, and wildlife across the state.

Geologically unique, the Medicine Lake highlands contain one of the headwaters

of the entire California watershed. The unique area has been formed by volcanoes, evident by lava flows with dark obsidian and deep craters. Below the surface, the aquifers capture snow melt, store as much water as California's 200 largest surface reservoirs, and discharge over 1.2 million acre-feet of snowmelt annually. The highlands host a wide variety of aquatic and terrestrial habitat, including the Fall River trout fishery.

The Sattitla region holds profound cultural significance for the Pit River and Modoc Tribes, who are urging President Biden to protect their ancestral homelands through a national monument designation. Safeguarding this area is crucial to conserve biodiversity, combat climate change, and advance 30x30 goals to protect 30 percent



Crowd in Weed College of the Siskiyou showing support for Sattitla

photo: Sara Husby

of California's lands and waters by 2030.

At time of this writing, Sierra Club staff, volunteers, and coalition partners have just finished attending an important next step in the process: a public listening session held on Saturday, December 7th -- *continued p. 2*

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photo: From EcoFlight

Aerial view over Shasta Lake, just south of the proposed monument and fed into by Medicine Lake and the Sattitla headwaters



Teri Shore, Mary Lunetta, Anne Henny and Jackie Feinberg, Sierra Club staff and volunteers, organize outdoor lunch for attendees in Weed at the Forest Service public meeting Dec. 7- in 30 degree weather.

hosted by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and U.S. Forest Service at College of the Siskiyous in Weed, CA. They gathered input from tribal leaders, local citizens, elected officials, business owners, and other stakeholders on the proposed monument designation to learn what it means for them and their communities. We had almost 500 people

in attendance. Attendees enjoyed bagels and pastries, local coffee, kombucha, and fry bread. The meeting, originally due to end at 12:30 pm, lasted until nearly 3 pm in order to accommodate everyone who signed up to speak. Ninety percent of comments were in support of the monument designation.

For years, Tribes and Indigenous advocates have called for this landscape's protection. A national monument designation would honor historic efforts to uphold Tribal sovereignty and support Indigenous-led conservation, while protecting against harmful development. With President Biden's term near its end, only a brief window remains to act.

As part of the ongoing push to urge the President to act, in September Senator Alex Padilla introduced legislation in Congress to establish an area of about 206,000 acres as a national

monument. The bill is S.5001, the Sattitla National Monument Establishment Act. ☞

(Mary Lunetta is Conservation Campaign strategist for California. She is based in Idyllwild but was seen on Dec 7, in Weed, busy organizing supporters at the Sattitla public meeting.)



photo: Anne Henny

Anne Henny speaks at Weed meeting to support a new Sattitla National Monument

Joan Taylor receives major award at Desert Anniversary celebration

-- by Anne Henny

On November 14, 2024 at beautiful Whitewater Preserve, a little north of Palm Springs and very near Joshua Tree National Park, at a celebratory event for the 30th anniversary of the California Desert Protection Act, a true Sierra Club hero—Joan Taylor—was recognized for her effective longtime activism for California desert protection. Joan received the prestigious Minerva Hoyt Award by the Joshua Tree National Park Association.

Joan started her desert advocacy close to her home in Palm Springs in the 1970s fighting destructive dam proposals in Tahquitz Canyon and the Whitewater River and sprawl development proposals near Palm Springs. She testified in court against trespass bulldozing in Palm Canyon and walked precincts to gain support for a moratorium on nuclear power in California. Later Joan co-lead Sierra Club's advocacy for designation of the Santa Rosa Wilderness and was pivotal in procuring funding to acquire land in Andreas and Murray Canyons to return to the Agua Caliente Tribal Reserve – one of the first “land back” initiatives.

Three decades ago, she led the first of dozens of Sierra Club lawsuits vs development in bighorn and other sensitive habitat around the Coachella Valley and elsewhere.

Joan has been a leading advocate on dozens of desert and species protection campaigns and held leadership positions in numerous Sierra Club and many partner land preservation organizations, some of which she helped found. She represented wilderness interests on the advisory committee for the 5 million-acre BLM Northern & Eastern Colorado Desert Plan Amendment, serving as Sierra Club liaison on the lawsuit challenging it. She also drafted the listing petition and led the lawsuit to compel US Fish & Wildlife Service to list peninsular bighorn sheep as an endangered species. And much more.



photo: Rob Taylor

Joan Taylor, left, with Joshua Tree NP Assocn. Directors Brendan Cummings and Erin Adams

Joan currently chairs the Sierra Club California Conservation Committee and the California/Nevada Desert Committee, among her many leadership roles. She's an active member of the CA/NV Wilderness Committee. She's also an avid hiker, wife and mom, and a dedicated grandma to her six grandchildren.

Joan Taylor has an extraordinary ability to work collaboratively on complex issues with agency staff and diverse stakeholders with diplomacy and humor. Her work ethic and sheer persistence are legendary. In granting the award, the Joshua Tree National Park Association stated, “Her work has safeguarded millions of acres of desert landscapes, ensuring the protection of sensitive habitats and species for future generations.” But Joan maintains that nothing is ever accomplished alone, and she considers campaigning with like-minded compatriots to be a reward in itself, as is knowing the land is saved.

The Minerva Hoyt California Desert Conservation Award annually recognizes individuals or organizations who made notable achievements in leadership, protection, preservation, research, education, and stewardship of California's desert lands. It's named for Minerva Hamilton Hoyt, an early desert conservationist, whose tireless efforts led directly to the establishment of Joshua Tree National Monument in 1936. ☞

Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary:

A New Jewel in California's crown

On November 30, 2024, in an historic moment for Indigenous Peoples and ocean conservation, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) finalized the designation of the Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary (CHNMS). The designation safeguards 4,543 square miles of California's Central Coast's

-- by Jennifer Bauer

marine life, from sea otters and seals to whales and seabirds. The sanctuary will play a crucial role in protecting these species and their habitats, ensuring their survival for future generations.



chumashsanctuary.org



pristine waters, vital ecosystems, and cultural sites. As the 17th national marine sanctuary, it honors the rich cultural heritage of the Chumash people and fosters new opportunities for research and education.

A Rich History

The Chumash people have inhabited the central coast of California for thousands of years, developing a profound understanding of the land, sea, and their interconnected ecosystems. Their knowledge and traditions have been passed down through generations, fostering a deep respect for the natural world. The designation of CHNMS is a recognition of this enduring relationship and a commitment to preserving the Indigenous cultural and ecological heritage of the region.

A Diverse Ecosystem

The sanctuary encompasses a wide range of marine habitats, including kelp forests, rocky reefs, sandy beaches, and offshore islands. These diverse ecosystems support a rich array of

Indigenous Leadership

The establishment of Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary is a testament to the leadership and advocacy of the Northern Chumash Tribal Council. The council, led by Chairwoman Violet Sage Walker, has been instrumental in advocating for the sanctuary's designation, honoring the legacy of her father, the late Chief Fred Collins. The sanctuary's establishment is a culmination of years of hard work and dedication by the Chumash people.

A Bright Future

The designation of Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary is a significant step forward in protecting California's coastal waters from offshore oil drilling and preserving the cultural heritage of the Chumash people. The sanctuary will be managed in partnership with tribes and Indigenous groups in the area. As the sanctuary continues to evolve, it will serve as a model for sustainable marine management and a source of inspiration for future generations. ♪

Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary



photo: Jennifer Bauer

Violet Sage Walker, chairwoman of the Northern Chumash Tribal Council, in relentless advocacy for the Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary



photo: Jennifer Bauer

Sierra Club Santa Lucia Chapter members celebrate the designation of the Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary

URGENT, Action needed Avi Kwa Ame, Nevada's newest national monument, is in danger

On November 19th, a U.S. Senate Committee passed the Southern Nevada Economic Development and Conservation Act, but there is still time to prevent this undesirable bill from becoming law.

We learned that this bill would open up 3,000 acres of Avi Kwa Ame National Monument, for which President Biden established protections just last year, for Off Highway Vehicle (OHV) use. This is a gut punch after years of fighting to establish a national monument on this sacred site. While we support outdoor recreation, there could not be a worse location for OHVs. OHVs are destructive to fragile terrain and should not be used in sensitive, sacred landscapes like Avi Kwa Ame.

(A previous version of this bill was introduced in 2021, without the current Avi Kwa Ame ORV provision, but



At Christmas Tree Pass in Avi Kwa Ame Monument; Spirit Mountain, a sacred summit, in background.

the Sierra Club opposed is provisions leading to new sprawl. See WOW, April 2021.)

The Southern Nevada Economic Development and Conservation Act (SNEDCA) would convert ~25,000 acres of public lands into urban sprawl in southern Nevada.



Hiking at Walking Box Ranch in Avi Kwa Ame National Monument

This sprawl would:
Strain water resources,
Create worse traffic,
Increase heat in the urban core,
Create worse air pollution,
Exacerbate carbon emissions and the climate crisis,
+ more.

We MUST fight back against this attempt to develop our public lands with motorized recreation and harm the environment of communities across

southern Nevada. With an incoming Trump administration, now is the time we should protect our public lands, not allow them to be damaged to appease special interests.

(There is a chance the bill can still be improved to remove its worst provisions, before end of this Congress, but time is short, the outcome very uncertain, and we urge immediate action to forestall an ominous result for Nevada.)

Please submit your comments today to protect our public lands, communities, and future. Tell your Congressional representatives you want Avi Kwa Ame kept protected, and say NO to dangerous urban sprawl.

(Las Vegas already exemplifies too well the nation's tendencies toward rampant sprawl development.)

➡ TAKE ACTION:

<https://act.sierraclub.org/actions/Toiyabe?actionId=AR0494150>

Thanks for building a better future with us, ∞

Olivia Tanager, Director,
Sierra Club Toiyabe Chapter

Another Nevada Monument proposal progresses--Wilderness Committee visits Bahsahwahbee site

-- by Anne Henny

In partnership with Toiyabe Chapter and members of the Utah Chapter seeking to re-start their Chapter outings program, on September 24 to 26, committee members enjoyed visiting the area of the Tribally proposed Bahsahwahbee National Monument, locally known for its iconic swamp cedars. This special land holds deep historical and religious significance for the Indigenous New Peoples of Eastern Nevada and Western Utah, who suffered three massacres here during the 19th century, one being the largest known

Indian massacre in U.S. history. Today, three Tribal Nations (the Confederated Tribes of the Goshute Reservation, the Duckwater Shoshone Tribe, and the Ely Shoshone Tribe) advocate for Bahsahwahbee as a national monument within the National Park System to ensure its preservation and commemoration. (See WOW, Dec 2023)

Our firsthand swamp cedars site experience strengthened our ability to support monument advocacy by the Tribes, Toiyabe Chapter, and other partners. ∞



Wilderness committee visitors in swamp cedars site in proposed Bahsahwahbee National Monument.

photo: Anne Henny

The Wilderness Act as a Solution to Settler/Colonial abuse of Nature

-- by Clayton Daughenbaugh

This topic is a good news / bad news story. The Wilderness Act is an effort to restrain the settler-colonial impacts on the other-than-human world. It's pretty good at that. But the Wilderness Act does not address settler-colonial impacts on the Indigenous humans that were here long before the settlers. This is a problem both for the oppression it ignores and because the problems brought to the other-than-human world by settlement generally proceeded in tandem with the human oppression. Genocide and ecocide were paired.

Considering the Wilderness Act as an Anti-Settler / Colonial Document, the plain language at the beginning of the Act illustrates the point. It was passed:

"In order to assure that... expanding settlement and growing mechanization, does not occupy and modify all areas ...leaving no lands in their natural condition..."

Clearly, the law is intended to address the harm having been and being done to the natural world by the settlement of the United States. Its target is the tendency towards over-development and domination of the other-than-human-world evidenced in the growth of what had become the USA. It is that society to which the Act addresses itself.

The assertion that big W wilderness



contains substantially anti-settler elements goes against some contemporary conversations arguing the Act is an assertion

of colonial oppression and erasure of indigenous peoples.

While not letting the Act, elements of its subsequent use, or the broader wilderness movement from which it emerged, off the hook, it is worth a look at the liberative elements of the document.

The Act's opening clauses frequently utilize power language contrasting the other-than-human world with development-oriented behavior of

colonial/settler-enabled U.S. society-- including what is probably its best-known phrase:

"A wilderness, in contrast with those areas where man and his own works dominate the landscape is... an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man..."

Here the Act is an effort to preserve the freedom of the natural world and resist the dominating tendencies of the settler colonial expansion oppressing other lifeforms. The Act seeks to restrain the western presumption of a human "right" to economic and recreational exploitation of land and non-human species, the spread of which across the continent is the recognized threat to wilderness. The word "untrammelled" [meaning uncontrolled or unmanipulated] re-enforces this message, highlighting the restraint or lack of human control in wilderness as contrasted with areas where settlement and mechanization dominate.

As is often noted, "untrammelled" does not mean pristine and untouched. In fact, as used in the Act, it presumes some level of human presence – a restrained presence. Hence the phrases "where man himself is a visitor who does not remain" and "without permanent improvements or human habitation", both of which presume an un-dominating degree of human presence on the land. This point deserves emphasis. These words and phrases do not mean no people, they mean a presence of people that is restrained and respectful of the land as home for the other-than-human. The specific target of these phrases is the impacts of settlement and mechanization brought to the continent by western colonization and economic expansion.

Similarly, when thinking holistically about the continent, the Act does not claim that wilderness places ever were, could, or should be everywhere. Rather, in the face of rapidly increasing human "works that dominate the landscape" driven by "increasing settlement and growing mechanization" it seeks to

"secure... an enduring resource of wilderness" amidst the spectrum of human activity.

Many see a denial of Indigenous presence and influence in those phrases. However, it is western settler forces that the Act addresses. Such phrases are an affirmation of the value of creatures' natural place as the dominant lifeforms within substantial areas (not all areas). They are a call to respect the homes of plants and animals in the face of widespread human intrusion and domination. Visitors acting respectfully come from their own place, but they don't take over, they don't stay indefinitely.

To sum up, the Wilderness Act is an effort to blunt the impact of settlement and mechanization on the natural world as it was occurring in the mid-20th century. Its language explicitly tries to maintain the overriding role of nature in areas designated as Wilderness and is specific in the restraints it puts on that settler activity. Central threats were roads, vehicles, logging, etc. The Act does not address Indigenous practices on the land which occurred prior to those lands being overrun by settlement. It thus serves as a Western mechanism to restrain and limit the impacts on the natural world.

This movement to free the natural world from the oppressive overreach of settler-colonialism does not address the settler relationship with their fellow humans Indigenous to the continent. Ironically, in recognizing the need to protect the natural world from extreme impacts of settlement and mechanization, the Act implicitly acknowledges that pre-settlement Indigenous nations were better at practicing restraint and respect. It offers a means of protecting the character of places important to Indigenous people and nations. The Act upholds as a model the "primeval character and influence" of natural areas which were more widespread prior to the arrival of the colonial enterprise.

That such a backhanded compliment
-- continued page 6

Wilderness Act as a solution

-- from p. 5

is the best the Act can do demonstrates the depth of the ethical pit in the society from which the Wilderness Act emerged—and against which it protests.

The Act values the results of the work of Indigenous peoples while at the same time it perpetrates a presumption of contemporary irrelevance of the pre-settlement people. It hypocritically takes for granted Indigenous practices more in sync with natural ecosystems which sustained the very wild places the Act seeks to protect while presuming the settler-colonial society will be able to right its course alone.

What are the odds of ultimate success with that plan, really, what are the odds? Even the most cursory review of United States history will perceive that genocide and ecocide proceeded in tandem across the continent. It stands to reason, or should for friends and advocates of wilderness, that promoting justice in the face of the genocide is vital to attain justice in the face of the ecocide, and vice versa. Restraining the blitzkrieg of settlement and mechanization requires a re-assertion of Indigenous sovereignty alongside the corrective self-restraint manifest in the Wilderness Act. Genuine co-management is a means of healing the land and the people (which was a central theme of the work promoting the Bears Ears National Monument). Greater sovereignty also suggests the return of currently private lands owned by settler descendants and corporations into indigenous stewardship as a helpful component restraining the domineering and ultimately suicidal trajectory on which “expanding settlement and growing mechanization” has placed us.

We need more wilderness. But wilderness isn't sufficient alone, it can't be the only way forward for the other-than-human world. Additional legislation establishing tribally led or co-managed cultural landscape protections would be a good complement. A means of returning Indigenous sovereignty to landscapes privately owned by the inheritors of settlement would be a blessing. We need more of both if we are to successfully

Celebrating 60 years of the Wilderness Act

-- by Randy Moore, Chief, U.S. Forest Service

September 3, 2024

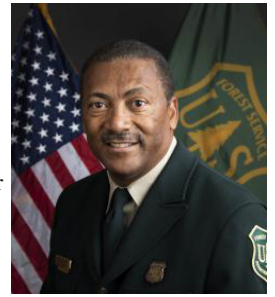
Long before the term wilderness existed and was universally used, people developed personal and deep connections to the land. It's a hefty word that reflects the diverse histories and cultures of the people who live on, care for and have shaped these lands for millennia. More importantly, these wild and wonderful wilderness areas need protection and thoughtful management, especially in our ever-changing modern world, so they can be sustained for generations to come. Enter the Wilderness Act.

Six decades ago, on Sept. 3, 1964, President Lyndon Johnson signed into law an act that established a National Wilderness Preservation System “... for the permanent good of the whole people.” This law directed federal land management agencies—including the Forest Service—to manage congressionally designated wilderness areas to preserve their wilderness character.

While 1964 may have marked the official beginning, the Forest Service, I am proud to say, recognized and mandated the importance of these wilderness areas long before...40 years to be exact! This year, the Gila Wilderness Area in southwest New Mexico is celebrating its 100th year as the world's first designated wilderness area, created at the behest of the visionary conservationist Aldo Leopold.

To commemorate this important and visionary legislation, the White House has proclaimed September as National Wilderness Month. (See p. 7) Our wilderness showcases to the world some of America's most special places and

Randy Moore,
Chief, U.S.
Forest Service;
formerly,
regional forester
for California
(Forest Service
Region 5.)



landscapes—forested mountains, alpine meadows, rocky peaks above timberline, tundra, lava beds, deserts, swamps, coastal lands and islands.

Today, the National Wilderness Preservation System consists of more than 800 areas—nearly 112 million acres in total—an area larger than the state of California. The Forest Service administers more than half of the areas (448) and about a third of the total acreage (almost 36.6 million) of the entire system.

As we celebrate National Wilderness Month, we continue to seek ways to make our wilderness areas inclusive, allowing visitors to connect with them. I invite you to make lasting connections and develop a relationship with these wilderness areas in a way that reflects your personal experience and culture. We continue learning from Indigenous communities about our human history and interdependence with these landscapes. Doing so will ensure that our wilderness areas truly are “...for the permanent good of the whole people.”

Join me in celebrating National Wilderness Month, reflecting on what wilderness means to you. I am proud of what we have accomplished as an agency in the last 60 years and am excited for the future of our agency, stewarding these wilderness areas together with our partners and Tribal governments. ♻️

address the apocalyptic crisis pair of climate change and mass extinction.

Our planet and humanity are on a destructive course brought on by “expanding settlement and growing mechanization”. We need the restraint Wilderness provides. We need greater recognition of inherent Indigenous sovereignty. We need both if we're to reverse the onslaught and preserve humanity's place on the planet. ♻️

(Clayton Daughenbaugh, of Illinois, is a long time Sierra Club wilderness advocate and now a member of the volunteer Sierra Club Board of Directors. This article is slightly condensed from a presentation he gave on August 29, 2024, at the 12th World Wilderness Congress (WILD12) <https://wild.org/>, held on Tribal lands in Rapid City, South Dakota)

February 19, 2025

Winter Wilderness meeting and Program:

PROGRAM: Through the Historical Looking Glass: Discussing the Criticisms of the Wilderness Act

Michelle Reilly, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Wilderness Liaison for the National Wildlife Refuge System, stationed at the Arthur Carhart National Wilderness Training Center in Missoula, MT. will give us a historical look at the Wilderness Act; its history is not without struggle, requiring many hearings, re-drafting, and compromises. But criticisms persisted. This presentation uses historical documents to provide context to the drafting of the wilderness Act itself.

We'll discuss three persistent criticisms and seek answers to questions like Where do these stem from? Are they warranted?

- 1) that the Act perpetuates a dichotomy between man and nature,
- 2) that untrammelled Wilderness refers to pure, un-peopled nature, and
- 3) that Wilderness is a cultural artifact that eclipses indigenous presence on the land.

⇒⇒ Email Committee chair JoAnne Clarke to get a zoom link. jo_clarke@att.net

PLEASE NOTE--This is NOT our NEXT meeting, we'll also meet Dec 18 and Jan. 15, but Feb.19 is the next PROGRAM

A Proclamation on National Wilderness Month, 2024



On Sept 3, 2024, the Wilderness Act turned 60. Among many celebrations for America's Wilderness, on Aug 30, the White House issued this proclamation:

America's beautiful natural landscapes are part of our Nation's identity, history, and heritage. One century ago, the Gila Wilderness was established as our country's first designated wilderness area, protecting this national treasure and beginning a new era of Federal conservation. Across our Nation, designated wilderness areas protect some of our most precious sites — soaring mountains, winding rivers, expansive deserts, and lush forests. These special places unite us, inspire us, and connect us to something bigger than ourselves. During National Wilderness Month, we recommit to the essential work of protecting our Earth, celebrate our country's natural places, and continue our work to ensure that every community has access to nature's gifts.

By conserving our wilderness, we not only protect key pieces of our Nation's history — we also protect the livelihoods of people who depend on our lands and waters. We protect and preserve Tribal communities' sacred landscapes. We sustain wildlife and conserve landscapes to help fight climate change and improve our Nation's resilience. And we ensure that generations of Americans can enjoy the beauty and power of our country's wilderness today and into the future.

That is why my Administration set the most ambitious conservation goal ever committing to conserve at least

30 percent of all our Nation's lands and waters by 2030. That goal is at the heart of my "America the Beautiful" initiative to support locally led, voluntary conservation and restoration efforts across the country. To that end, my Administration has made historic investments to protect our shared natural heritage, such as investing \$1.4 billion in ecosystem restoration and resilience through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

To date, my Administration has conserved more than 41 million acres of our Nation's lands and waters. I restored protections for the desert buttes of both the Bears Ears National Monument and the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument in Utah and the underwater canyons of Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine National Monument. I established six new national monuments, including the Baaj Nwaavjo I'tah Kukveni in Arizona and the Avi Kwa Ame National Monument in Nevada. And I expanded the San Gabriel Mountains National Monument and the Berryessa Snow Mountain National Monument in California.

Further, I withdrew the United States Arctic Ocean from new oil and gas leasing. And I took executive action to consider designating more than 700,000 square miles of the Pacific Ocean southwest of Hawaii as a new National Marine Sanctuary.

My Administration is taking

action to harness our national resources in the fight against climate change; protect our forests; and improve the health of our Nation's lands, waters, and wildlife. Together, we can continue to advance locally led and locally supported proposals for conserving our most unique and beautiful lands and waters. And we can continue our partnership with Tribal Nations, working together as co-stewards and ensuring that Indigenous Knowledge is respectfully included in the care of our natural heritage.

During National Wilderness Month, may we celebrate the people who steward our designated wilderness areas. And may we continue to protect and conserve these areas so that generations of Americans will know their beauty, serenity, and power.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, JOSEPH R. BIDEN JR., President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and the laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim September 2024 as National Wilderness Month. I encourage all Americans to experience our Nation's outdoor heritage, to recreate responsibly and leave no trace, to celebrate the value of preserving an enduring wilderness, and to strengthen our commitment to protecting these vital lands and waters now and for future generations.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this thirtieth day of August, in the year of our Lord two thousand twenty-four, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and forty-ninth.

JOSEPH R. BIDEN JR. ✍

A commercial ski resort in the Ruby Mountains?

No! Elko County Planning Commission denies a request to rezone private ranchland — the latest in long attempts to develop a ski resort in the area.

“Building a ski resort in the Ruby Mountains would be like putting a Walmart in Yosemite Valley,” -- Olivia Tanager, director of Sierra Club’s Toiyabe Chapter,

A request by a private landowner to rezone thousands of acres in the Ruby Mountains was shot down by the Elko County Planning Commission on November 21— the latest in a series of failed attempts to build a commercial ski resort there that date back to the 1950s. [The area in question is just a short distance north of the famed Ruby Mountains Wilderness, 92,000 acres designated in December, 1989.]

Peter Christodoulo, a Bay Area resident, avid skier, and investment firm employee, requested the commission rezone nearly 3,000 acres of land. Earlier this year, he closed on his purchase of Ruby Mountain Ranch, which included a lower 900-acre parcel and an upper, 2,296-acre parcel. The property extends from near the Elko area Spring Creek subdivision up to the crest of the Ruby Mountains, known as the “Swiss Alps of Nevada.”

The range is revered for its beauty and remoteness. This popular but off-the-beaten-path destination for backpacking and hiking in the summer is difficult to access in the winter. Despite receiving an average of more than 300 inches of snow per year, there is no ski infrastructure, and the mountains are primarily accessed by

helicopter and snowmobile.

Christodoulo sought to have some of his land, currently zoned as open space, rezoned to accommodate future development that could include a ski resort with an old-school vibe, he previously told *The Nevada Independent*.

The commission voted 4-1 to deny the application; two commissioners were absent.

The rezoning request garnered support from some Elko County residents and skiers across the West; others staunchly opposed the proposal. The Sierra Club’s Toiyabe Chapter collected comments from 500 Elko community members opposed to the zoning change.

“Building a ski resort in the Ruby Mountains would be like putting a Walmart in Yosemite Valley,” Olivia Tanager, director of Sierra Club’s Toiyabe Chapter, said in a written statement. “We are thankful the Commission agreed with the community voices opposing the ski resort.”

A vocal group turned out on Nov. 21 to oppose this and another rezoning request. Public comment extended into the night as residents spoke against the projects, with reasons ranging from the importance of preserving the wild mountain range to concerns about traffic and road access.

Christodoulo has previously told *The Nevada Independent* he’s comfortable with whatever the planning commission decides. If the commission had authorized a zoning change, he would have sought capital partners and investors with the goal of “putting together some sort of ski resort,” he had said. If not, the

property can still be skied, he said, by using a snowcat or installing a private lift for himself, family and friends.

The Ruby Mountains in northeast Nevada stretch for nearly 100 miles and include 10 peaks above 10,000 feet. The range is home to one of the state’s largest mule deer herds, as well as mountain goats, bighorn sheep and Lahontan cutthroat trout. Since 1989, a significant portion of the range has been federally protected as Wilderness. [It is one of Nevada’s 72 federal wilderness areas.] ↻

(Information from Nevada Independent, Nov. 22, 2024; [https://thenevadaindependent.com/.](https://thenevadaindependent.com/))

New hikes book available by Sierra Club author:

Elaine Gorman, longtime volunteer leader with the Mother Lode Chapter’s Yokuts Group, based in Modesto, CA, writes us about her new book:

“It isn’t necessary to travel to Yosemite, the high Sierra, or a Wilderness Area to get a dose of nature. I often hike near my home in the San Joaquin, and I enjoy introducing others to the beauty, interest, and fun that is available nearby.”

VALLEY VENTURES offers 20 hikes that are easily accessible from Stanislaus and San Joaquin counties in the San Joaquin Valley of California. The narrative hike descriptions include natural and cultural history, mileage, special attractions, directions/drive time, and hiking tips.

All hikes are within a two-hour driving range, and include hikes in the San Joaquin Valley, the foothills, and eastern Bay Area.

The book is available through Bookish Modesto: (\$14.00)

<https://bookishmodesto.com/item/XbdF5uhc6Wa8H4e-hjwuug> ↻

photo: Vicky Hoover



Wilderness Committee hikers in the Ruby Mountains, summer, 1988 (before it was designated wilderness)

BLM revives long-dormant Wilderness Study Area policy

-- from GREENWIRE |

The Bureau of Land Management has quietly implemented a policy change that could greatly expand its ability to conserve thousands of acres of some of the most natural federal lands under its care.

Specifically, BLM revived a long-dormant policy--unused for more than 20 years--that the bureau says allows it to apply the highest levels of protections to parcels identified as having "wilderness characteristics," designating such lands, mostly remote, roadless rangelands, as official "Wilderness Study Areas" (WSAs).

The WSA designation is key, as the agency has the "flexibility" to manage these areas to keep them eligible for potential future wilderness designation, meaning they are afforded the highest levels of management protection and are generally off-limits to human activities except hiking, canoeing, and some hunting and fishing.

BLM has used the resuscitated policy to designate four new wilderness study areas covering a total of 13,000 acres in two recently approved land-use plan updates in California and Colorado. And it proposes to designate more than 20 wilderness study areas for 42,547 acres in a proposed land-use plan update in Oregon.

"It's an important tool to have back in the toolbox," BLM Director Tracy Stone-Manning proclaimed in an email sent to Mary Jo Rugwell, president of the Public Lands Foundation Foundation, the bureau's retiree group.

The Bureau published on its online policy page [an information bulletin](#), dated Oct. 15, that it sent to district and field offices informing staffers of the change. BLM says the Interior Department's solicitor's office "recently" issued a legal opinion concluding the policy is authorized under Section 202 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act, (FLPMA) which governs how the bureau manages the 245 million acres it oversees.

BLM's emailed statement added that the "policy implementation" simply "clarifies the BLM's authority" under FLPMA "to manage certain lands in

Northwest Forest Plan affects northern California forests

-- by Teri Shore

Proposed changes to 30-year-old federal protections for forests, old growth reserves and spotted owls would allow far more logging and threaten old-growth trees and the surroundings of multiple wilderness areas on a vast area of more than 24 million acres of public lands stretching from Northern California to Oregon and Washington.

In California, the draft Northwest Forest Plan (NWFP) covers the Klamath, Lassen, Mendocino, Modoc, Shasta-Trinity, and Six Rivers National Forests--which contain well-known wilderness areas such as Snow Mountain, Trinity Alps and Marble Mountains, King Range, Crater Lake and Siskiyou, as well as Cache Creek, Cedar Roughts, Yuki, and Yolla Bolly.

Aggressive amendments to the historic Northwest Forest Plan call for doubling the amount of commercial tree cutting in old growth stands and mature groves, mostly under the guise of wildfire prevention and to keep timber mills operating. Some conservationists are calling it a "disaster plan" and "very ugly."

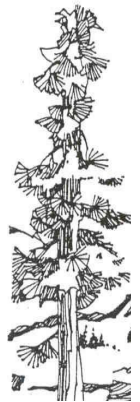
The origin of the NWFP dates back

to the tree sits, timber wars and spotted owl controversies of the mid-1990s when forests were being clearcut. The plan aimed to protect old-growth forests and provide a more rational way forward to manage our forests. Now it is being overhauled and reversed in many ways that appear to undermine decades of improved stewardship.

The NWFP and draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is now open for public comment through March 17, 2025, leaving the future of forests, rivers, wildlife and habitat in the hands of the next administration.

The April 2024 issue of Sierra Magazine contained an outstanding article with a detailed history of the NWFP: <https://www.sierraclub.org/sierra/thirty-years-after-its-creation-northwest-forest-plan-still-saving-trees>,

Sierra Club is leading the way to respond to the NWFP changes under the leadership of national forest campaigner Alex Craven and a three-Chapter Task Force. Many Sierra Club members recently received early warning -- *continued page 10*



a way that preserves their wilderness characteristics, including the option to designate them as WSAs."

Until 2003, it was not uncommon for BLM to designate wilderness study areas during the land-use planning process. But after a legal settlement that year sparked by a lawsuit by the state of Utah, the agency stopped doing so.

Sierra Club wilderness advocates have for years urged the Bureau to bring WSA designations back into use. Reviving the wilderness study area policy is consistent with other BLM Biden administration initiatives, including the bureau's sweeping public lands rule, implemented in June, that elevates conservation as a formal use of federal lands, on par with mining, energy development and livestock grazing.

Critics say the policy change will be a certain target for President-elect Donald Trump, who has promised to open more federal lands for energy development and mining and has vowed to eliminate policies that conflict with that priority.

The conservation and landscape health rule, among other things, prioritizes conserving pristine landscapes, mostly through designation of "areas of critical environmental concern," or ACECs, which are managed to protect natural and cultural resources, and to restore other rangelands to make them more resilient to the impacts of a warming climate.

But the rule faces a series of federal lawsuits from six states, as well as ranching, mining and energy groups, including the Western Energy Alliance. ♾

Amargosa Basin Monument Campaign

-- by Susan Sorrells

through an advocacy postcard that generated thousands of responses -- calling for strong conservation measures before the EIS was released.

“The Northwest Forest Plan was the first — and remains the only — landscape level, ecosystem-based management plan on our federal forests,” said Craven. “Those foundational principles must guide any amendment process and ensure that land managers are able to focus on the key areas for updates, like climate change, carbon storage, and Indigenous consultation and inclusion.”

Wilderness lands are grouped in the NWFP under Congressionally Reserved Areas (CRAs) that include wild and scenic rivers, and national parks and monuments, totaling 7 million acres and about 30 percent of the total area covered.

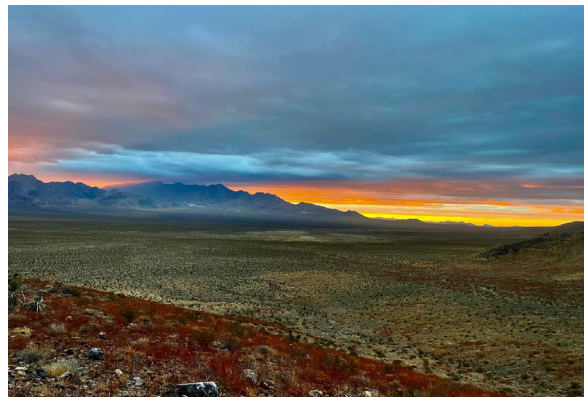
While commercial logging would remain banned in wilderness areas, exemptions in the Wilderness Act for wildfire management open the door to mechanized thinning and logging operations that are already bulldozing swaths of forest land, such as in designated wilderness in Mt. Hood and Willamette Valley National Forests in Oregon and Washington, respectively.

In other NWFP land use designations including Late Successional Reserves (LSAs) and Riparian Reserves (RR), increased commercial logging and tree removal, with associated disturbance from heavy equipment and new roads and fuel use, are sure to have direct negative environmental impacts on the forests, habitat and wildlife like the spotted owl. These actions will threaten the character and value of adjacent wilderness. It did not appear that these indirect impacts on wilderness were analyzed in the EIS; and they should be. ♪

(Teri Shore is vice chair of the CA/NV Wilderness Committee and Redwood Chapter conservation chair.)

The Amargosa Basin is one of the few desert regions where a river runs through it. The Amargosa River--at the eastern edge of California, in Inyo County-- was declared a Wild and Scenic River in 2009 because its springs, seeps and spring brooks sporadically emerge, creating lush desert ecosystems that support a plethora of life. (See WOW articles, Apr 2020 and Aug 2021.)

These fragile ecosystems, and the lands that surround them, are under siege from inappropriate development such as mining, industrial solar and unregulated growth. The most concerning threat is that to the Basin’s water. Although most of the lands in the Amargosa Basin are public, these lands have diverse piecemeal designations so there is no holistic, coordinated



Sunset over the Amargosa Basin

photo: Susan Sorrells

management and, to make the situation worse, in some instances the protective status is not permanent. To meet these challenges, residents and other concerned citizens joined together to form the Friends of the Amargosa Basin, (FAB), a nonprofit incorporated in December 2020 that seeks to achieve monument status for the Amargosa Basin.

Now four years later FAB has created a strong foundation of support. Since its incorporation, Friends of the Amargosa Basin has reached out to local communities, Tribal nations, legislative representatives, and local and national organizations. FAB originated within the communities of the Amargosa Basin, so it has been a natural first step for this organization to listen to these community and Tribal partners to build a strong alliance that represents the

voices that call this land home. FAB has organized multiple listening sessions regarding the monument to facilitate communication and educate residents and visitors. These dialogues have overcome many misunderstandings and have consolidated support. FAB also has sponsored fun events like geology and bird talks and walks, and even a two-day Vole Fest, all very well attended, to spotlight the natural treasures of the region.

But there is even a much broader base of support from those throughout the United States, and even throughout the world, who consider the Amargosa a unique landscape that must be protected. As a way to reach out to these supporters, FAB each summer has organized its online Summer Salon Talks, These presentations have introduced FAB as an organization and described the unique, fragile aspects of the Amargosa, both cultural and natural.

Last summer’s series also explained the process of monument designation. The last of the series featured Matthew Leivas, a Salt Song singer, with “Storied Connections Across Sacred Lands”. More than fifty participants engaged in this event. Such activities that engage locals and visitors with the land and its people have boosted support for FAB; the number of people who have signed up on FAB’s website to become a “Friend” doubled and then tripled.

FAB also has realized the need to build campaign infrastructure. As a new organization, it has worked with professional consultants who have helped organize the monument campaign, with communication and board development plans. FAB also received guidance on coalition building and blueprints for reaching out to state and federal decisionmakers. Through all these efforts, FAB continues to build a diverse coalition that, together, can achieve a land status change to a national monument, a change to protect our area for generations to come. ♪

Upcoming trips

30x30 San Gabriels hike Jan 25, 2025 - Sat

Join Angeles Chapter on a 30x30 hike to celebrate the area added to the San Gabriel Mountains National Monument and learn what more is needed from the heroes who helped make this happen. We will meet at 9 am, at Placerita Canyon Nature Center at 19152 Placerita Canyon Rd. Our leader/naturalist Melissa Diaz will lead us on the Canyon Trail for the 3.6 miles r.t. with elevation gain 292 ft. Roberto Morales, from National Sierra Club, Juana Torres from Forest Committee, Sandra Cattell from Santa Clarita Regional group and Melissa Diaz will discuss the designation of this area, work still needed to allow public accessibility to the newly designated monument area (there are currently no trails), stewardship, options for a trail system, and more. Afterwards, we'll drive 4.8 miles to San Gabriel Monument's Sand Canyon area for a short naturalist walk. Event ends about noon with a picnic in the designated picnic area-- food provided. **Bring** a picnic blanket, hiking shoes, layers of clothing, Sun hat, water, sunblock, sun protection. Rain cancels. **Level:** moderate. Contact Barb Hensliegh: barbarajhensliegh@gmail.com. ☞

Spring Desert Service Feb 14-16, 2025 - Fri-Sun

Wilderness Committee's annual desert campout is anticipated for Amboy Crater in Feb. We'll help with trail work and celebrate Mojave Trails National Monument 10th anniversary. Optional commissary with Vicky Hoover. Contact Anne Henny, leader, at anneth16@sbcglobal.net. ☞

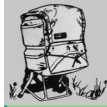
Outings to Advocacy:

Santa Lucia Chapter Oso Flaco hike

-- by Jennifer Bauer

In October, the Santa Lucia Chapter in San Luis Obispo County combined a Hike and Dine outing at one of their 30x30 Local Conservation Priority sites (Oceano Dunes State Vehicular Recreation Area State Park) with an informative talk on 30x30, Indigenous history, and area conservation.

On a picturesque fall day, members gathered at Oso Flaco Lake, a unique ecosystem where a freshwater lake, wetlands, and coastal sage brush intertwine with a dynamic dune system. Santa Lucia Chapter and 30x30 taskforce



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

Wilderness Committee fall outings report -- by Anne Henny

Leadership and organizing support for Molok Luyuk partnership hike

Sierra Club provided leadership support to a celebratory October 30x30 partnership hike to the Berryessa Snow Mountain National Monument. The hike, part of the annual California Natural Resources Agency 30x30 Partnership Event in Sacramento October 2-4, was hosted by Sierra Club California and co-led by Tuleyome and California Native Plant Society. We celebrated the addition of Molok Luyuk to the Monument, a key 2024 victory for California 30x30.

As Mahtisa Djahangiri described our outing, in Sierra Club California's Capitol Voice: "As part of the summit, our 30x30 team organized a field trip to celebrate the addition of Molok Luyuk, meaning Condor Ridge in the Patwin language, to Berryessa Snow Mountain National Monument. Together with our amazing partners, including Tuleyome, and the California Native Plant Society, we explored the stunning Stebbins Cold Canyon Reserve, surrounded by breathtaking views of the national monument and Lake Berryessa. Local plants, such as McNab cypress, have long been used for food, ceremonies, tools, and medicine. <https://www.sierraclub.org/california/capitol-voice-october-2024> ☞



photo: Anne Henny

Nevada Public Lands Day Service in Basin & Range National Monument

For the second year in a row our CA/NV Wilderness Committee participated in a BLM Public Lands Day Service event at Basin and Range National Monument in remote south-central Nevada, with a great group of dedicated folks from Friends of Basin and Range National Monument. On the service day, Sept. 28, we installed signs at 3 locations at the monument's boundaries; our Sierra Club group worked at the southern boundary near rugged Mt. Irish. That evening, we were treated to programs by Friends of the Monument on Nature Journaling, Myths and Lore of the Night Sky and night photography. Next day we explored the springs and rugged rock formations near our remote campsite before heading home. ☞



photo: Jennifer Bauer

Santa Lucia Chapter members explore the Ocean Dunes at Oso Flaco Lake. The sand dunes are one of the state's largest remaining dune ecosystems.

Jennifer also highlighted goals of the 30x30 initiative and the ongoing efforts to conserve the sensitive dunes going back nearly 60 years. In recent years, the Chapter has actively advocated for the removal of motorized vehicles from the area and opposes State Parks' proposed expansion of the off-road vehicular area to include hundreds of RV sites, drive-in campsites and cabins. ☞

Salmon return to Klamath River after dams' dismantling

(From a Power in Nature newsletter article, Oct 30, 2024, by Ian James)

Less than two months after the removal of dams restored a free-flowing Klamath River, salmon have made their way upstream to begin spawning and have been spotted in Oregon for the first time in more than a century, biologists with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife announced.

State biologists in California have seen salmon in creeks that had been inaccessible since dams were built decades ago and blocked fish from reaching their spawning areas.

"It's amazing," said Ron Reed, a Karuk Tribe member and traditional fisherman. "That's what we've prayed for." Reed and other Indigenous leaders and activists spent decades campaigning for the dams to be removed, believing that restoring the Klamath River would help struggling salmon populations recover. Reed said he is not surprised the fish have quickly made their way far

upriver and into their ancestral creeks.

The hydroelectric dams, built between 1912 and the 1960s, not only blocked salmon from reaching spawning areas but also degraded the river's water quality, contributing to toxic algae blooms and disease outbreaks that at times killed masses of fish. With those dams now gone, members of Native tribes along the river say they are optimistic that salmon, which are central to their cultures and fishing traditions, will thrive again. In Oregon, biologists are finding Chinook salmon.

The dismantling of four dams took more than a year and was the largest such removal effort in U.S. history. The utility PacifiCorp agreed to take down the aging dams — which were used for power generation, not water storage — after determining it would be less expensive



salmon--Evon Zerbetz © 1996

than bringing them up to current environmental standards. (See WOW, Dec 2022, Aug 2023.)

In late August, workers using machinery carved channels in the remnants of two dams, allowing water to flow freely again along more than 40 miles of the Klamath River. Salmon now have access to more than 400 miles of the river and its tributaries and can reach cold spring-fed waters that have been inaccessible for generations.

Reed and other members of the Karuk Tribe have fished for fall-run Chinook. He said the fish they catch in their nets look strong and healthy — "so much more beautiful this year."

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife's plan for reestablishing wild, self-sustaining salmon populations in the Klamath calls for monitoring Chinook and coho salmon, as well as steelhead and lampreys, as fish gradually move into areas upriver during the next 12 to 15 years. ♻️

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

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OPEN--San Francisco Bay, Kern Kaweah, Santa Lucia Chapter coordinators--volunteers sought. Join us!

FIRST CLASS

from:
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*A quote for the Wild:
The wilderness that has
come to us from the eternity of
the past we have the boldness
to project into the eternity of
the future.*

-- Howard Zahniser



La crisis climática está aquí. No hay un planeta B. ¡Manténgamos las tierras silvestres!