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# WILDERNESS RECORD

PROCEEDINGS OF THE CALIFORNIA WILDERNESS COALITION

ISSN 0194-3030

Vol. 17, No. 11

2655 Portage Bay East, Suite 5 Davis, CA 95616

November, 1992



The main fork of the Merced flows through Yosemite National Park, two national forests, and a wilderness study area named for the now-wild-and-scenic river.

Photo by Tim Palmer

## W&SR designation for Merced creates mining-free corridor

By Ron Stork

More than eight years after the first Congressional bill on the Merced River was introduced, Congress finally acted in October, passing a bill sponsored by Representative Gary Condit (D-Modesto) that designates the lower Merced as a wild and scenic river (W&SR) and withdraws the land on the river's banks from mining. President Bush signed the legislation on October 9.

The newly designated eight-mile stretch of the Merced passes through the Merced River Wilderness Study Area (WSA), between Briceburg and Lake McClure (a reservoir). The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has recommended against wilderness designation for the WSA.

The bill also requires the BLM and the Stanislaus National Forest to begin studying the W&SR potential of the North Fork of the Merced, both inside the WSA and at its headwaters in the national forest. In its forest plan issued last year, the Stanislaus National Forest rejected W&SR status for the North Fork. Forest planners now will have to revisit the issue; decisions from both agencies are due within three years.

Rep. Condit's legislation breaks new ground in its

treatment of public-lands mining in W&SR corridors. Under the generic provisions of the National Wild & Scenic Rivers Act, new mining claims can continue to be filed and worked along designated recreational and scenic rivers. Other than a requirement to file a plan of operations on BLM lands, there are few restrictions imposed by the Wild & Scenic Rivers Act on the nature and intensity of mining operations permitted in the river corridor under the 1872 Mining Law.

H. R. 2431, the Condit bill, withdraws the right to file new claims on national forest and BLM lands along and within the Merced and its South Fork—a half-mile-wide corridor all the way to the Yosemite National Park boundary, regardless of the classification of the river. In all, 25 miles of river will be closed to new mining. (Both the South Fork and the portion of the Merced inside Yosemite and adjacent national forests were designated W&SRs in 1987.)

After existing claims lapse, are challenged, or are purchased and retired, mining will be permitted only at the discretion of the federal land manager—not as a pre-eminent right that supersedes all other public uses of the

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## Logging threat in Yolla Bolly Wilderness

By Jim Eaton

This fall a hunter was startled to come upon trees marked for logging in Beegum Basin, a particularly scenic part of the Yolla Bolly-Middle Eel Wilderness. On returning home he began contacting friends to determine how logging could occur inside a wilderness area. This is how the conservation community learned of the problem.

The marked trees turned out to be on private land recently purchased by Lonnie Johnson of Meridian, Idaho. In September, Johnson filed a timber harvesting plan to log 80 acres of his inholding, half of which is in the wilderness. The plan calls for logging the beautiful and biologically important Beegum Basin, located on the northeastern border of the wilderness less than a mile from North Yolla Bolly Lake.

Growing on this private land is an ancient red-fir forest with trees more than 200 years old. As admitted in the plan, "the proposed harvest area is in a roadless area surrounded by thousands of acres of virgin forest." In addition to the forest, there are several important wet meadows up to an acre in size. Two streams flow year-round, including Beegum Creek.

The area is home to the threatened northern spotted owl, goshawk, and pine marten. A consultant called the area "some of the best spotted owl habitat I have seen."

Johnson's proposal would result in two clearcuts each larger than 30 acres on lands that are considered highly prone to erosion. According to the timber harvesting plan, slopes range "from gentle [sic] (less than 10 percent) to steep (about

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# COALITION PAGE

## MONTHLY REPORT

BY JIM EATON

Since we did not go on our traditional long backpack trip this summer, Wendy and I decided to take a second five-day trip. Columbus Day weekend (Indigenous Peoples' Day in Berkeley and other places), we trekked into the Snow Mountain Wilderness in the northern Coast Range.

Although I usually am hesitant to hike during hunting season, I reasoned that most backcountry hunters would be unlikely to mistake our dog, Inyo, for a black-and-white deer. Still, I kept him close at the Tom Maloney Trailhead as the campground echoed with the gunshots of thwarted hunters taking out their frustrations on inanimate objects.

We took the newly constructed Crooked Tree trail that pleasantly parallels the Middle Fork of Stony Creek until it links up with the old trail. We then huffed and puffed our way up the steep ridge in the hot October sun until we reached the site of the Milk Ranch, a dairy farm in the last century.

Here we found many new "no trespassing" signs tacked on the trees and a large horse encampment sprawled across the trail. We worked our way around them to a campsite in the lower meadow. Unfortunately, we were close enough to hear their chainsaw serenade later that afternoon.

The next morning Inyo and I opted for an ambitious hike up and around the peaks of Snow Mountain. We reached the east summit only to find what I thought was a rock prayer wheel, forty feet in diameter. "There goes the neighborhood," I grumbled.

I sat back in the warm sun to read the peak register. Two books were nearly filled with entries from the past two years alone. I recognized the names of two CWC members—trivia contest winner Bill deJager and Clyde Wise. The Willits Women Wilderness group had made it, along with various equestrian groups. Several groups of mountain bikers had illegally pedaled to the summit.

A surprising number of young people from the

Fout Springs Boys Ranch had signed in, most of them proud (and some terrified) at having climbed Snow Mountain on their first backcountry excursion. Fifteen teenage boys and girls took credit for the rock labyrinth I saw. And the geodesic marker for the mountain had been stolen.

Ah well, I reflected, this still is better than the roads and clearcuts the Forest Service originally proposed for the area.

On the way to Cedar Camp, I saw numerous ruts where mountain bikers had careened off the narrow trail four months earlier. Heading back to Milk Ranch I saw in the fragile earth circles from a spinning motorcycle that I had discovered several years before. Wilderness heals slowly.

That evening, as Wendy and I climbed Signal Peak to watch the sun set over the foggy Pacific, my outrage mellowed. While telling her about the labyrinth, I remembered my own teenage transgressions, like building a rock-lined trail in my best Boy Scout fashion around a portion of a remote lake in the Yosemite backcountry.

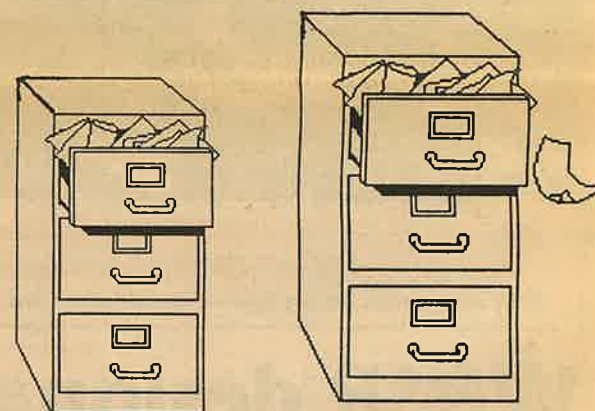
What really had bugged me, what bothers me still, were the wheeled outlaws who had ridden past the clearly-marked wilderness boundary to show that they will go anywhere they damn well please and leave destruction behind. I wasn't too thrilled about the chainsaw, either.

We sat around the campfire that evening listening to coyotes strike up a conversation just across the meadow. Inyo responded to the call of the wild with raised hackles and a warning growl.

But as I enjoyed the coyotes yipping in the full moon that rose over Snow Mountain, it came to me that the wilderness experiences of the kids from Fout Springs and the rock sculpting teens were making them better people and increasing their appreciation of nature. I should not begrudge their treading on my sacred place. For as Edward Abbey reminds us, "the wilderness needs no defense, only more defenders."



With ingenuity and scrap wood, Jim transformed a rickety student desk into a stable new work station to house our new computer. Now if only we had more filing cabinets...



## Letters

Dear Editor,  
I like your newsletter and its articles covering all wilderness issues in California.

What I find puzzling is your use of the U. S. Forest Service term "salvage" logging. It conjures up images of burned, dead trees. In my hikes in the neighborhood of Lake Alpine, Highway 4, I see good healthy trees cut down, with massive damage to the trail and forest, loaded up in trucks, and taken down the road.

When the nearby forest ranger is questioned, he has only a foggiest notion of the location where the logging is going on, but always refers to it as a "salvage" operation. This word is a misnomer, used to deceive the public. I wish that you would explain the term in the newsletter.

Yours truly,  
Mar Lynn Ormsby  
Davis

We agree that both the practice and terminology of "salvage" sales often are inherently bad for the environment. It is

necessary, however, to distinguish between ordinary timber sales, which are subject to administrative appeals, and salvage sales, however massive, which are exempt. In the future, when referring to salvage sales we'll treat both the term and the subject more carefully. —Ed.

### Uncle Jim's Wilderness Trivia Quiz Question:

You smash a towering home run out of the playing field, and the ball lands in a designated wilderness area. Where in California are you?

Answer on page 7

There's still time to submit your candidates for the ten roads that should be removed first from California's wild areas. We also want to hear about any experiences you may have of "ecosystem management," the new Forest Service rubric that has replaced the old "new perspectives." (Two articles exploring the concept and practice of ecosystem management begin on page 4.)

## Wilderness threats

# Modern desert mines are a heap of trouble

By Stan Haye

Shorty Harris, the archetypal old desert miner, described himself as a "single blanket, jackass prospector." In environmental terms, he could do relatively little damage, limited as he was to the use of a shovel, pick, and black powder.

The typical 1990s desert miner works for a large corporation, often foreign-owned, and sits in a D8 CAT. His potential for environmental damage is multiplied a thousand-fold. The newest boom in desert mining is an example. Although large-scale open-pit mining (of iron and copper) and cyanide treatment of the ore have been used for many years, their use in the large-scale mining of gold in arid areas of the west is new. Today, millions of tons of rock which may contain only 0.04 ounces of gold per ton are leached with cyanide to extract the gold. The result is huge holes in the ground (the open pits), huge piles of rocks which do not contain gold (called "overburden" or waste rock) removed to get at the gold-bearing material (ore), huge areas of spent ore and mud which may contain toxic materials ("tailings"), and "barren" ponds the size of small lakes containing poisonous water.

The process goes like this, in a very simplified way. First the overburden is removed, and the ore is blasted, if necessary, to break it up. The ore is then treated with cyanide dissolved in water. This can be done by piling the ore on an impervious clay or plastic liner on the ground. The piles can be several hundred feet high. Cyanide solution is applied to the top, allowed to soak through the pile, and collected in pipes in the bottom. Cyanide may be applied by ponding, in which shallow ponds are spread on top of the pile, sprinkling (using equipment similar to garden sprinklers), or drip irrigation.

This process is known as heap leaching. The cyanide chemically combines with the gold (and, if present, other minerals). The solution then is piped to a mill where the gold is separated from the cyanide. After treatment, the cyanide solution is piped back to the barren pond, cyanide and lime are added, and the solution is recycled back onto the ore to extract more gold.

The environmental concerns with this process are many and obvious, and the first reaction of most environmentalists is to just say no. Unfortunately, this is usually not possible. Mining on federal land was given preferential treatment by an 1872 mining law which has remained in force with few amendments. The 1872 mining law recognized mining as the highest and best use of federal land. The more recent Federal Land Policy and Management Act, which regulates mining on lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management (which has extensive holdings in the California desert), merely sets a standard that mining operations cause no "unnecessary or undue degradation." Of course, the National Environmental

Policy Act, the various federal air and water quality acts, laws regarding hazardous chemicals, pollution control, and worker safety apply to all federal land. In addition, land administered by the Bureau of Land Management is subject to California's Surface Mining and Reclamation Act. The practical effect of these regulations, however, is minimal: It is almost impossible for federal land managers to just say no, and mitigation and reclamation, though legally required, are seldom adequate.

### A blight on the desert

When reviewing a plan of operations for proposed heap leach mining, environmentalists should pay particular attention to the following issues:

First, cyanide is a deadly poison.

It has been used safely for many years, but never on this scale. Although no human deaths have resulted from the use of cyanide in mining, thousands of animals and birds have died. In the past, animals died after drinking water from the ponds, but this hazard has been largely eliminated

by proper fencing and netting of ponds. Still, repeated exposure to low levels of cyanide over a period of years may be harmful; no studies have been done. Second, the aesthetics of this whole process are horrible. Huge pits, huge piles of broken rock, mucky ponds of tailings, roads, pads, buildings, and pipes may blight many acres. Third, pollution—air-borne dust from blasting, crushing, and

there may be other problems, such as acid mine drainage or vibrations from blasting.

An adequate environmental review should, at a minimum, cover these points:

- Barren ponds must be covered with netting or replaced with enclosed tanks. Heap leach piles also should be netted because some birds like to fly through the sprinklers, or sit under them, or wade in the cyanide if it is ponded. Tailings ponds are especially attractive to wading birds; detoxification of the tailings may not be acceptable if the toxicity is not reduced to a low enough level. The Migratory Bird Treaty Act, which permits no mortality of migratory birds, is a powerful tool.

- Reclamation and restoration of the landscape should not be put off until after the mine is closed. Insofar as possible, reclamation and restoration should be performed concurrent with the operation. At a minimum, specific reclamation plans should address removing roads and buildings, detoxifying and stabilizing tailings, regrading and covering waste rock and tailings with topsoil, and revegetating the area.

- Standards for pollution control should include measures to minimize and contain dust and to monitor cyanide levels in the air, water, and ground. Cyanide evaporates from the solution, and a lethal gas is produced under certain conditions. Toxic heavy metals may be present in the tailings. The clay or plastic liners under heap leach piles and ponds must be thick enough to prevent pollutants from leaking into the ground water. Double lining is always necessary.

- Complete hydrologic reports detailing water availability and use should be required. If water pumping lowers the water table below predicted levels, wells should be shut down. Water conservation efforts, like the use of drip irrigation and barriers to evaporation, should be employed. Reducing water use not only benefits the environment but also the miner who will have reduced pumping costs.

- A reclamation bond sufficient to cover all costs of reclamation and restoration should always be required.

Miners sometimes complain that environmental requirements cost too much. If the cost of mining exceeds the price of gold, then the mine should not be operated.

Conservationists should not let miners blame them for the fact that they have to do business in an environmentally acceptable way.

Shorty Harris had environmental responsibilities commensurate with his ability to do damage. So do modern miners.

**Miners sometimes complain that environmental requirements cost too much. If the cost of mining exceeds the price of gold, then the mine should not be operated.**



The Colosseum Mine, typical of modern heap leach operations, is visible from nearby Clark Mountain Wilderness Study Area. Photo By Peter M. Jensen, courtesy of The Wilderness Society

traffic, and the cyanide and the toxic metals combined with the cyanide—is both an aesthetic and a health problem. Fourth, and often the most serious in desert areas, is water. Cyanide heap leaching uses a lot of water. Water losses result when water evaporates from ponds and from the solution applied to the piles. In specific cases,

## Wilderness management

# Ecosystem management engenders skepticism

By John Hopkins

In early June, U. S. Forest Service Chief Dale Robertson issued a memo stating that the Forest Service will utilize "ecosystem management" together with a new approach to public involvement in decision-making for the national forests. Does this herald a change in course by the agency or is it just another buzz phrase, a smokescreen for business as usual? Are there new opportunities for environmentalists to influence the management of individual national forests? Decide for yourself.

### What is ecosystem management?

Ecosystem management is a concept that arose in the 1980s from meetings and discussions among scientists and agency personnel. For forests, it involves acknowledging that the simple tree-farm mentality does not work, that all components of an ecosystem, from trees to fungi and soils, must be considered in developing an integrated management approach. It requires that managers look at the land on various scales, from stands of trees to large landscapes, and consider different time frames. Ecosystem managers need to recognize that nature is dynamic, that change and natural disturbances are key factors in the life of a forest. They need to consider all the interactions that are occurring as well as any external impacts on an area. It's a tall order, and environmentalists wonder if the Forest Service is up to the task.

Biologist Tim Clark has called ecosystem management the "management of natural resources using systems-wide concepts to ensure that all plants and animals in ecosystems are maintained at viable levels in native habitats and basic ecosystem processes are perpetuated indefinitely." A view like this links the process of integrated management with the goal of ecological health, an essential approach if we are to avoid degrading our forests further. Effective management of an ecosystem requires addressing the protection and restoration of long-term ecological health and determining what human activities can occur and how they should take place in terms of this ecological health. This approach should involve a system of "bio-indicators" or biological performance standards, stress the protection of all aspects of native biodiversity, from species and habitats to ecosystem processes and structure at all scales, and include cooperative, coordinated management across land ownership boundaries at the scale of watersheds and larger landscapes.

### What's wrong with the Forest Service approach?

The Forest Service does not appear ready to meet (or set) the goal of biological health. Rather, the agency seems bent on separating the concept of ecosystem management from the goals of ecosystem management. Robertson, in his June memo, and Deputy Chief James Overbay, in a speech at a Salt Lake City workshop in April, clearly stated that developing goals for forest management is a separate issue. The agency's goals, or "desired future condition," an all-too-familiar term to forest planning junkies, involve balancing ecological concerns and human economic concerns, not putting the human economy into an environmental framework.

In addition, Overbay talks of using a larger scale of management to produce patterns of areas. In some areas, the Forest Service would emphasize "resource products and uses" while focusing on "ecological conditions and environmental services" in others. That sounds a lot like the status quo and suggests a basic lack of acceptance of the importance of ecological health.

The agency's working guidelines for ecosystem management do at least include the injunction to "work within the ecological potential of sites and landscapes, maintain native diversity and employ nature's processes to the greatest degree possible." This is inadequate, however, especially for an agency with a deeply ingrained timber-management ethic, an agency that is continually under pressure to provide for short-term logging opportu-

nities rather than the long-term viability of forests. There appear to be many loopholes that could be used to maintain a "get out the cut" men-

tality even in the face of overt environmental degradation.

Slightly more encouraging are agency statements about why they are making these changes. Among the reasons given are the public's demand for a broader approach to national forest management, with greater emphasis on environmental and amenity issues, and an

increased scientific understanding of the role of biological diversity in sustaining ecosystem health.

The technical assessment of the California spotted owl, issued by a team of Forest Service scientists in May, will be an early test of the agency's commitment to ecosystem health. As explained in the July issue of the *Wilderness Record*, the scientists made far-reaching recommendations for the management of the Sierra Nevada, including preservation of all larger trees, greater use of prescribed burns, and restoration of the forests to more natural conditions. We expect the agency either to adopt or weaken the recommendations later this fall.

The scale of ecosystem management may also be a problem with the Forest Service's approach. Although there are few examples of Forest Service ecosystem management to study in California as yet, I am aware of two, and both are small-scale. The Cherry Hill planning unit in Sequoia National Forest is 28,000 acres, and the Mammoth-June study area in the Inyo National Forest is 45,000 acres. (See companion article below.) Ecosystems can be small or large, from a wetland or a pond to the whole planet, and the boundaries of any particular ecosystem will be different for different issues. However, the boundary of an individual ecosystem management planning area needs to be based on the biology and topography of the area, not conventional agency planning units. Often, large watersheds will make good ecosystem management units, especially since cumulative impacts on water quality are a key issue in our forests. In addition, one of the

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*The Forest Service needs to consider that in a natural, undisturbed ecosystem, "no action" is management and may be the best strategy for them to pursue.*

## One activist's experience

By Sally Miller

Last September, the Inyo National Forest announced, to the surprise of everyone, that the management plan for the Mammoth-June area would be developed using the principles of ecosystem management. When forest officials last met with interested parties in January 1991, the Mammoth-June plan had been dubbed a "development plan" by the forest supervisor. Needless to say, the announcement was greeted with a good deal of skepticism by local conservationists. What does the Forest Service's adoption of ecosystem management for the Mammoth-June area mean for this threatened eastern Sierra gem?

First, some background. The Mammoth-June area encompasses 45,000 acres of national forest land between the towns of Mammoth Lakes and June Lake. Within this region lie the 21,000-acre San Joaquin Roadless Area, two large subalpine meadows, ancient forest, extensive riparian areas, significant biological corridors, and many unique volcanic land forms. Besides its inherent ecological value, the Mammoth-June area provides abundant opportunities for dispersed, low-impact recreation (in marked contrast to the heavy emphasis on developed recreational pursuits in nearby Mammoth).

The 1988 forest plan allocated the bulk of the Mammoth-June area as a "potential alpine ski area," to accommodate a decades-old proposal by Dave McCoy to link his Mammoth Mountain and June Mountain ski areas to create one of the largest ski resorts in the world. The remainder of the area was allocated primarily for logging and dispersed

recreation. In an attempt to placate conservationists, the two meadows were recognized as "special interest areas," to be managed for continued semi-primitive recreation and grazing. In the forest plan, the Forest Service committed to preparing an environmental impact statement (EIS) for the Mammoth-June area that would analyze potential alpine skiing, ground water "mining," geothermal development, and other proposals while taking into account cumulative impacts.

As an introduction to ecosystem management, invited "key players"—including ski area developer Dave McCoy, several environmentalists, local elected officials, Congressional candidate Patricia Malberg, and the local press—spent a lively day with Forest Service staff in the field discussing and debating how ecosystem management might apply to the Mammoth-June region. The trip fostered good dialogue and better understanding among the various participants but failed to answer just how ecosystem management will be incorporated into the planning process already underway.

After collecting data and establishing resource thresholds, the Forest Service will initiate public scoping. Preparation of a draft plan and EIS will follow. The Forest Service expects to issue a final decision in 1996.

Despite the introduction of ecosystem management to the process, the Forest Service has said it is constrained by the direction in the forest plan in managing the Mammoth-June area. As the Forest Service has said, "this [new planning] effort will not revisit or revise the forest plan." Thus, potential development of the country's largest alpine ski

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## Wilderness management

# BLM is on the brink of wilderness

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) soon will oversee vast tracts of wilderness in California, an unprecedented and somewhat unlikely scenario for an agency long considered antagonistic toward wilderness. But the BLM, like the rest of us, knows that some sort of desert bill will be enacted, perhaps as soon as next year, and consequently, the BLM is gearing up for the transition. In Ridgecrest next month, BLM personnel from all over the state will attend a wilderness training course designed to introduce the agency's field staff—biologists, geologists, botanists, recreation planners, and range conservationists—to the principles and problems of wilderness management. In charge of the transition is a former wilderness ranger with a degree in zoology and a seemingly limitless enthusiasm for the job. Recently, we talked to Paul Brink, the BLM's new Wilderness Coordinator for California, about the changes that are coming and the unique challenges the BLM will face.

Today, the BLM is responsible for only five wilderness areas in California, all of them contiguous to larger areas managed by the Forest Service or Park Service. Total BLM wilderness acreage is less than 14,000 acres. When you consider that even the Bush administration's proposal for desert wilderness is two million acres and is itself considered meager by environmentalists, you begin to under-

stand the scope of the transition the BLM is embarking on. In addition to the millions of acres in scores of wilderness study areas (WSAs) in the California Desert Conservation Area, the BLM also manages a million more acres of potential wilderness outside the desert, from Susanville in far northeastern California all the way to the Mexican border. By contrast, the Forest and Park Services (with decades of experience) together manage some six million acres of wilderness, less than would be designated by the Cranston desert bill alone.

So we are lucky indeed that the person supervising the transition is a true wilderness believer, someone who sees his job as an exciting challenge rather than a headache of bureaucratic proportions. Three years after coming to California from the wilds of Montana, Paul Brink is still marveling at the diversity, ecological and demographic, of our state. In Montana, he recalls, "multiple use was two cows in a pasture." Multiple use has an entirely different meaning in a state with 30 million people speaking dozens of languages and wanting a variety of recreational choices on their public lands. Brink finds California more polarized about environmental issues than his previous postings. But at least, he says with relief, "they don't talk cow here."

Visitors to WSAs both inside and outside the desert will find cattle grazing, but the aridity of many of the areas makes them inhospitable to both visitors and cows. Recreational use of most WSAs, particularly those in the desert, is limited because water

sources are scarce. Brink sees the inhospitability of the BLM's future wilderness as an asset. "BLM wilderness may be closer to the intent of the Wilderness Act," he predicts, because biodiversity, rather than recreation, can be the manager's key focus.

Managing for biodiversity will be accomplished with the Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC) system now used by the Forest Service to monitor recreation impacts. Brink says the BLM will utilize LAC for more than just recreation. That's good news for environmentalists who believe that the LAC process, if assiduously followed, can provide the

data needed to assess the impacts of grazing and other consumptive uses of wilderness. Perhaps the largest stumbling block to the success of LAC is inadequate funding for the continued monitoring it requires. Brink expresses concern that the BLM's wilderness management

may be "set up for failure" if Congress does not authorize sufficient funds when it enacts wilderness legislation.

The prospect of wilderness designation already has triggered new work and new expenses for the agency, and the costs are bound to rise. Field staff are documenting so-called "improvements" to the WSAs that will have to be removed or excluded from wilderness boundaries. Some "improvements" will remain, and they will pose significant management challenges. Roads will need to be closed and eventually obliterated; canals will have to be maintained. Miners with valid claims and inholders are entitled to access to their property, and then there's the border patrol which will want to enter areas on the Mexican border even after they are designated wilderness.

For help with these herculean challenges, the BLM is looking to universities and the environmental community. Brink would like to see a wilderness institute in

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## Mammoth-June

**continued from page 4**

area (one that would accommodate up to 60,000 skiers at a time), or large-scale ground water mining, or a mountain bike park, must somehow be reconciled with ecosystem management. Local conservationists have a hard time comprehending how any of these practices in a *de facto* wilderness with critical ecological value could possibly be compatible with managing for long-term ecosystem health.

If the Mammoth-June area were managed "to sustain diverse, healthy, and productive ecosystems" (as described by the agency's own principles for ecosystem management), logical alternatives might include a core wilderness encompassing the roadless area, a biological reserve system, continued limited low-impact recreational use, or a combination of these management options. Other sensible management changes should be an exclusion of grazing from the sensitive "special interest area" meadows, permanent protection for old-growth forest and riparian areas, and an extension of the boundaries of any specially-designated areas to include entire watersheds rather than pieces.

Ideally, the Forest Service should reexamine its management direction (as the agency apparently is doing for the Sequoia National Forest) and subsequently tailor its management prescriptions to clearly defined standards. From the Inyo, we instead have an attempt to fit ecosystem management into a plan that, by its direction, poses inherent conflicts with sound "management" of an ecosystem. Furthermore, the forest plan's allocation of much of the area for potential ski development has created the unfortunate expectation that some development will in fact occur; this may prove unreasonable once the true value of the resources has been assessed.

Despite these problems, eastern Sierra conservationists have not written off ecosystem management. We see the agency's adoption of ecosystem management for the Mammoth-June area as an opportunity for us to hold the Forest Service to the principles of managing for ecological health.

If this latest Forest Service effort fails, conservationists will again turn to our traditional recourse for improper management of our national forests—legislation and litigation. But we truly hope that the Forest Service will rise to the challenge of managing for healthy and sustainable ecosystems.

CWC Board member Sally Miller has an abiding interest in protecting the San Joaquin Roadless Area and other eastern Sierra "gems."



An ecosystem can be as small as a meadow or as large as the planet. In the San Joaquin Roadless Area, Glass Creek Meadow and White Wing are visible from atop the San Joaquin Ridge.  
Photo by James Wilson

## Wilderness news

### Ecosystem management—smokescreen or path to biodiversity

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basic tenets of ecosystem management is to consider ecological processes and natural disturbances at large scale. With units of this size, that cannot be done.

**How will the public be involved?**

Another requirement for ecosystem management is public involvement in all stages of the planning process. The agency's ecosystem management guidelines call for involving "interested and affected people in the full process of making decisions about common resources."

Robertson envisions "a new, higher level of dialogue or partnership with the American people to go along with ecosystem management." Since the refrain of public involvement during the whole planning process was used by the Forest Service as its rationale for trying to abolish appeals of management decisions (see update on this page), environmentalists may well be skeptical.

It is not clear how this aspect of ecosystem management will pan out. It probably will vary from place to place. The district ranger for Sequoia's Cherry Hill unit, for example, says "public participation will be especially important at several points." His options for involving the public include a newsletter on agency progress, field trips, public meetings, and open houses. This sounds more like an effort to meet the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act than to involve people in the full decision-making process.

Many environmentalists feel that, whatever its limitations, the agency's ecosystem management program does offer important opportunities. Especially, says The Wilderness Society's Louis Blumberg, if the Forest Service can be made to

consider that "in a natural, undisturbed ecosystem, 'no action' is management and may be the best strategy to pursue." One approach, especially for some key areas, will be to develop our own alternative proposals early on in the process, proposals grounded in the protection and restoration of an area's ecological health. Is there a doctor (or a midwife) in the house?

*John Hopkins is Chair of the Sierra Club's California Biodiversity Task Force.*



The new mining restrictions will protect only a half-mile corridor along the Merced River in Merced River Wilderness Study Area. Photo by Jim Eaton

### Congress rescues timber sale appeals from the ax

A plan to eliminate administrative appeals of Forest Service timber sales has been nullified by Congressional action, *High Country News* reported. In late September, Congress included language that upholds and strengthens the appeal process in an appropriation bill. Environmentalists had decried the Bush administration's plan, announced last March (see article in April 1992 *WR*), because it would have forced timber-sale opponents into costly litigation.

The legislation, courtesy of Rep. Bill Richardson (D-NM) and Sen. Wyche Fowler (D-GA), instates a 30-day comment period prior to all timber sales and a 45-day grace period for appeals during which the Forest Service may not pursue approved sales. Only those individuals and groups who have submitted comments or otherwise notified the agency of their concern will be allowed to file administrative appeals, however.

### Yolla Bolly

continued from page 1

70 percent)." The plan claims that logging "will create an opening in this timber stand that would resemble [one] created by nature...." Since there is no road to the inholding, the trees would be removed by helicopter.

The U.S. Forest Service considers the private land a high priority to acquire but has no plans at this time to purchase it or offer a land exchange. Johnson has indicated that he is in no hurry to log the area and would be willing to sell the land for a fair price.

Some activists have expressed annoyance that the Forest Service did not let the conservation community know that this timber sale was being planned. Had it not been for a hunter stumbling across the marked trees, there is no telling when this logging project would have come to the public's attention.

Environmentalists now are working to stop the logging plan and to have the land purchased or exchanged for other public land. Discussions are underway with the Trust for Public Land, an organization that frequently purchases inholdings in wilderness or other sensitive areas.

#### WHAT YOU CAN DO

Write a letter to the California Department of Forestry asking them to deny approval of this plan to log the Yolla Bolly-Middle Eel Wilderness. Send a copy of your letter to the Forest Service so they will understand the public concern and begin plans to acquire the land.

*Send your letter to:*

Richard Wilson, Director  
California Department of Forestry  
1416 Ninth Street  
Sacramento, CA 95814

*Send a copy to:*

Ron Stewart, Regional Forester  
U.S. Forest Service  
630 Sansome Street  
San Francisco, CA 94111

### BLM gearing up to manage wilderness

continued from page 5

California to coordinate research on both wilderness recreation and wilderness-related sciences. Local activists could help the BLM's field staff, and both the academics and the "affected public" could get involved in drafting boundaries for the potential wilderness outside the desert.

For all the anticipated challenges of an inexperienced agency managing an unprecedented amount of desert wilderness, at least the principles of desert wilderness management, once agreed on, will be widely applicable. The situation is very different for the WSAs outside the desert, which represent a stunning array of diverse ecosystems and management choices. But wilderness designation for those areas may be a long way off; in the meantime, Brink and the BLM have plenty to do.

### W&S Merced

continued from page 1

land. Environmentalists hope that this legislation will be a first step to preservation of the McCabe Flat campground and beach across from the WSA, where a mining claimant has asserted her right to remove trees, picnic benches, and other improvements to look for some bits of placer gold that may rest on bedrock ten or fifteen feet below the surface.

Although the legislation does nothing to protect the 32 miles of the Merced River immediately downstream of the reservoir, which are subject to being inundated by two major Merced Irrigation District dams, more dams occasionally have been proposed by diverse interests since the 1960s. Designation of the entire Merced River upstream should end any realistic threats of further dam construction on this beautiful spring-run river.

*Ron Stork, Associate Conservation Director for Friends of the River and a CWC Board member, has spent the last decade working to protect the "wonderful spring wildflower displays against a backdrop of a dramatic, wild canyon with a sparkling river," the Merced.*

## Book review

### New guide is a peak experience

#### *The High Sierra: Peaks, Passes, and Trails*

By R. J. Secor, *The Mountaineers, Seattle, 1992, 365 pp., \$19.95.*

With an updated description of all the known routes on High Sierra peaks, *The High Sierra: Peaks, Passes, and Trails* undoubtedly will be popular among "peak baggers" and climbers. The book's chapters describe roads, trails, cross-country routes, and peaks within 14 geographic regions ranging from Mt. Whitney to northern Yosemite, but the peaks section is by far the most extensive.

Route descriptions, as well as information on their length, difficulty, and quality are offered for numerous routes that have been used since Steve Roper published his *Climber's Guide to the High Sierra* in 1976. Information on older routes is updated, and some difficulty ratings have been changed, changes which in most instances appear to better reflect the rating system currently in use. Especially helpful are the abundant photographs and drawings, which enable the reader to locate the less obvious climbing routes and are indispensable given the proliferation of alternate routes on the more popular peaks.

The cross-country routes section detailing trail-less passes provides a good indication of the difficulties encountered, difficulties which might not be evident from

studying topographical maps. Hikers with a penchant for cross-country travel will find this section informative, despite the author's annoying habit of naming previously unnamed passes for his friends.

The roads section of each chapter provides short but adequate descriptions of automobile access to trailheads. I found the trails section disappointing, as information on scenery, ecology, vegetation, difficulty, and best places to camp is scant. The tedious descriptions provide the reader with little more than the ability to locate a trail on a map. The usefulness-to-weight ratio, an important criterion of books written to be lugged around the wilderness, might have been improved by eliminating the trail descriptions entirely.

*The High Sierra: Peaks, Passes, and Trails* is mainly a climber's guide, despite what the broad title indicates. The usefulness of this book to most hikers and backpackers may be limited. However, peak baggers, rock climbers, and backpackers looking to do some cross-country travel should find Secor's book a valuable resource.

—Eric Knapp



### CWC t-shirts: the height of fall fashion

James models our six-tone anniversary shirt which comes in light blue, yellow, light green, or peach for \$15. The animal design Sally wears is by Bay Area cartoonist Phil Frank; it comes in beige or light gray for \$12. All the shirts are 100 percent double-knit cotton. To order, use the form on the back page.

### Wilderness Trivia Quiz Answer:

The Yosemite Wilderness near  
Wawona.

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## DATES TO REMEMBER

**November 15** APPLICATIONS DUE for the National Watershed Organizing School's January 13-18, 1993 session at Camp Gualala. For details and an application, call Friends of the River at (916) 442-3155.

**November 17** NATURAL DIVERSITY FORUM sponsored by the state Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Wildlife at the California Academy of Sciences Auditorium in San Francisco from 9:30-5:00. Invited speakers include Dr. Elliot Norse and poet Gary Snyder. For more information, call (916) 445-5441.

**December 1** SCOPING DEADLINE on an amendment to the Sequoia National Forest's Land and Resources Management Plan. The amendment will address ecosystem management and wildlife needs and will incorporate the provisions of the mediated settlement. Send your comments on the amendment and the planning process to: Sequoia N. F., 900 West Grand Ave., Porterville, CA 93257-2035. For more information, call Julie Allen, Forest Planner, at (209) 784-1500.



**California  
Wilderness  
Coalition**

### Purposes of the California Wilderness Coalition

...to promote throughout the State of California the preservation of wild lands as legally designated wilderness areas by carrying on an educational program concerning the value of wilderness and how it may best be used and preserved in the public interest, by making and encouraging scientific studies concerning wilderness, and by enlisting public interest and cooperation in protecting existing or potential wilderness areas.

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### The Wilderness Record

The *Wilderness Record* is the monthly publication of the California Wilderness Coalition. Articles may be reprinted; credit would be appreciated. Subscription is free with membership.

The *Record* welcomes letters-to-the-editor, articles, black & white photos, drawings, book reviews, poetry, etc. on California wilderness and related subjects. We reserve the right to edit all work. Please address all correspondence to:

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Printed by the Davis Enterprise on recycled paper

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## There goes the wilderness

"We don't want to be a regulatory agency, we want to be a development agency on our national lands."

—Interior Secretary Manuel Lujan

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