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# WILDERNESS RECORD

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Doctor Rock, Siskiyou Wilderness, Six Rivers National Forest

Photo by Jim Eaton

## Six Rivers Plan still bad news for roadless areas

By Ryan Henson

The million-acre Six Rivers National Forest stretches like a long, thin ribbon from southern Humboldt County north to the Oregon border. At its widest point, the forest is only 22 miles wide.

As the name implies, the Six Rivers National Forest contains portions of several of California's most important rivers, including the Eel, Smith, Van Duzen, Mad, Trinity, and Klamath. At one time the forest hosted some of the most prolific salmon and steelhead runs in the state, but today these fisheries are on the decline and are proposed for listing under the Endangered Species Act.

The forest's recently released Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP) and Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) is the latest attempt to resolve more than a decade of litigation, policy changes, and general acrimony mostly over the management of old-growth forests and critical fish habitat. The first draft of the LRMP, released for public comment in 1986, was withdrawn due to lawsuits over the destruction of ancient forest ecosystems as symbolized by the decline of the northern spotted owl. In 1994, President Clinton's Northwest Forest Plan (Option 9) was approved and permanently changed land management in the Six Rivers and other national forests and Bureau of Land Management districts within the range of the northern spotted owl.

In addition to the protections required by Option 9, Congress designated the majority of the Smith River watershed as the Smith River National Recreation Area (NRA) in 1990. The 306,000-acre NRA is mostly off-limits to logging, but a small logging program will continue in portions of the area.

The LRMP is being hailed by many conservationists for its reduced logging program—it calls for cutting 15.5 million board feet (MMBF) of trees annually, down substantially from the 175 MMBF per year called for in the 1986 draft. While this reduction is due mostly to the old-growth and riparian reserves designated by Option 9, the LRMP could have allowed far more logging than it did.

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## Clinton signs logging without laws bill

By Ryan Henson

In a stunning blow to environmentalists, on July 27, 1995 President Clinton signed the Rescissions Act (a bill designed to cut millions of dollars in spending allocated by the previous Congress) which included an amendment exempting salvage logging (the logging of supposedly dead, dying, or diseased trees) from all major federal environmental laws until December 31, 1996. The amendment also prohibits conservationists from opposing these sales through the administrative appeals process or the courts. This lawless logging amendment was appended to the Rescissions Act as a "rider."

Riders are often used to pass controversial measures that could never survive on their own without being attached to a larger, more popular bill. Riders often become lost in the language of the larger bill, thus making them more difficult for the press, public, and politicians to detect. Often, opponents do not become aware of riders until it is too late to effectively oppose them. For this reason, they are becoming increasingly popular in Congress among those bent on undermining federal law for the sake of special interests, without garnering any negative publicity in the process.

This secrecy was intensified by the Clinton administration itself which kept the details of the final version of the Rescissions Act quiet until the president signed the bill. Thus, there may be other riders attached to the bill, including one that exempts the issuance of grazing per-

mits on federal land from environmental laws (as we go to press we could not confirm whether or not this "grazing rider" made it into the secret, final version of the bill signed by Clinton).

President Clinton vetoed an earlier version of the bill because of the drastic cuts it proposed in education funding. At the time, he expressed grave reservations about the salvage rider, but in the weeks thereafter, rumors flew that Clinton had accepted the rider in exchange for smaller cuts in education and job training programs, as well as increased earthquake disaster aid for politically important California.

This confirmed the worst fears of many conservationists who believe that Clinton views environmental concerns as mere bargaining chips for the issues he cares more about. Ironically, Vice-President Gore strongly opposed the rider and personally lobbied the president to veto it once more. Vice-President Gore also publicly lambasted Senator Slade Gorton (R-WA) and other authors of the rider as shameless servants of big timber and chided them for not having the political courage to introduce the amendment as a bill in its own right.

### Frightening possibilities

The rider leaves few stones unturned in its quest to exempt salvage logging from all oversight, scrutiny, and law. For example, the rider exempts salvage logging from

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## Coalition news

### Monthly Report

With Lucy off on her three-month sabbatical, this is my first issue as acting (pretending?) editor. I'd forgotten how much detail goes into the *Record*, and Lucy did much of that for this issue before she left. I also have her high standards to strive for.

I'm easily distracted, though, so while in the final stages of layout I got a call from Sue Rodriguez-Pastor asking if I had time for lunch. I call Sue one of the "wolf women" from her days with Friends of the Wolf, but she now works for the Biodiversity Legal Foundation in Boulder, Colorado.

On my way to meet her, I ran across David Orr holding court in Mishka's, a new coffeehouse in Davis. By the time we returned, he had found Bob and Jan Mountjoy of Hayfork wandering around town and invited them to the party. CWC co-founder Bob Schneider joined us as well.

Our lunch discussions went on and on, until I realized that I did have an obligation to get the *Record* finished and printed for our faithful volunteers who attend our monthly mailing party. There have been occasional glitches that have resulted in a gathering with nothing to do (like the time I simply forgot to pick up the printed newsletter from the printer), and my penance has been to do the entire mailing myself.

But it was nice to get out of the office to see old friends. It's not like I have been chained to my computer and telephone—Ryan and I have been wandering around the state this summer. And with his work on the province advisory committee and other meetings, he has become a Redding commuter.

We travelled to Ventura and Santa Barbara to meet with local activists and conduct several clinics on The Wildlands Project at Patagonia stores. Ryan had to hop a plane to get back in time for a meeting with Representative Vic Fazio, while I stayed on for some more meetings and a wonderful reception hosted by the environmental community in Santa Barbara. I got to meet some CWC members there and had a great time.

From there it was off to Redding to meet with activists working on the four northwest California national forests. The final forest plans are now finished, and we needed to plan our joint strategy.

I also got in a four-day backpack. Wendy decided the only way to keep one weekend a month free of meetings was to get it on the calendar long in advance (she already has a February weekend for snowshoeing on the 1996 calendar). We did have a June weekend planned, but my ribs had not yet repaired themselves by then.

After asking around about snow conditions, we settled on Silver King Creek in the Carson-Iceberg Wilderness. There was one bank of snow about 8,800', but it was on the highest ridge we crossed.

We crossed three ridges to get to Silver King. Coyote and Cattle creeks were small, but I'm glad we didn't have to cross Silver King Creek. It would have been a deep wade.

Flowers were unbelievable. Wonderful abundance and variety. Same went for mosquitoes.

Wendy was taken aback at the miles of fences crisscrossing Upper Fish Valley, so we camped downstream in the trees. The fences were built in an attempt to allow the endangered Paiute cutthroat trout and cows to coexist, but that experiment apparently had ended. The Toiyabe National Forest recently told the casino-owner permittee that the cattle were coming off the land. We'll see if they can make their decision stick.

The final day we awoke to a cloudy sky and beat a retreat. After hiking downstream several miles, we ascended 1,200' through a delightful garden of flowers that changed in composition as we rose. Dozens of species were in full bloom.

It was so much fun, we've got another weekend blocked off for August.

**By Jim Eaton**

### Against bringing back the grizzly

"Bring back the griz!" (WR, June 1995) is a bad idea. Here's why:

I prefer to hike and backpack the California mountains solo. One of the reasons I stick to California is that I won't have to confront grizzlies. Call me chicken, but I face enough backcountry risks without grizzly bears. I'm unimpressed by statistics showing that the risk of grizzly attack is very low. The nuclear power industry uses statistics to show me that my risk from nuclear waste is very low. Thanks all the same, but when it comes to grizzlies and nuclear waste, I choose zero risk. I want to remain at the top of the food chain, and I'd rather not be eaten alive. When and if the grizzly returns to the Sierra, I'll have to go. Please don't drive me from the trails.

The idea that returning grizzlies to California would increase tourism is nonsense. The majority of tourists can't tell one kind of bear from another. They're thrilled to see *any* bear, and California's black bears are just as big a thrill as grizzlies are for tourists. Further, if grizzlies return to California, I predict a wave of human-bear encounters that will lead to many injured and some dead humans and a lot of dead bears. To return grizzlies to overused, overpopulated California might be a death sentence for them. We kill bears that raid our food. What do you think we'll do to bears that carry off Sis or Junior? And when those inevitable attacks are publicized—as they surely will be—tourism will plummet. In any case, why do the California Wilderness Coalition and the Mountain

Lion Foundation think an increase in tourism is desirable? California's ecosystems are suffering from too much exploitation already.

There are no measures that hikers can count on to be sure of avoiding grizzly attacks. Black bears at least behave predictably. Grizzlies are notoriously unpredictable.

What will become of the present ecosystem? Grizzlies vanished from a sparsely settled California where most people lacked private transportation. Now, grizzlies would face a California that's densely populated by highly mobile people. Also, ask yourself what would become of the ecosystem that's developed in the grizzly's seventy-year absence. The black bear's range has greatly expanded since the California grizzly became extinct. Caught between the grizzlies and the people, where would the black bears go? If the intent of restoring the grizzly is to start restoring an extinct ecosystem, consider these: The "restoration" of the bighorn sheep is a failure. Wetlands mitigation doesn't work. The truth is that we can't restore an extinct ecosystem. Our best hope is to save it from destruction in the first place, which is why I belong to the California Wilderness Coalition. Face it: it's too late for the grizzly in California.

Finally, anyone who's anxious to encounter grizzlies can go where the grizzlies still exist. There's no need to bring them here.

—Kathy Morey  
Mammoth Lakes

### Dying to help the CWC? Perish the thought!

Putting the California Wilderness Coalition in your Will is an excellent way to assure we can continue protecting and preserving California's precious wildlands far into the future.

Currently, the Coalition's Smoke Blanchard fund, an endowment honoring the late mountaineering guide, supports wilderness preservation efforts on the Sierra Nevada's East Side, an area Smoke particularly loved.

To leave a bequest, simply add a paragraph to your Will stating: "I bequeath to the California Wilderness Coalition the sum of \_\_\_\_ Dollars [or, for insurance policies, land, or other property, please specify]."

If you would like to discuss leaving a bequest to the Coalition, please call Executive Director Jim Eaton at (916) 758-0380. All information will be held in strict confidence.



### For the grizzly

I hate to inject a note of scientific accuracy into the grizzly reintroduction debate, but I had to respond to a letter printed in the last *Wilderness Record* that accused Mark Palmer of "missing the fundamentals of mountain ecosystems" because Palmer allegedly failed to recognize that "our wildlife heritage is not a heritage of bears at the top of the food chain." According to the letter, Indians skillful at killing bears were the top predators in early California.

Sorry, that's just not true. The best archeological evidence we have is that humans ventured across the Bering Straits no earlier than 14,000 years ago. At the Page Museum at the La Brea tar pits, where paleontologists have found a wealth of megafauna that is now extinct, including the short-faced bear, twice as large as the grizzly, the dire wolf, and the sabre tooth cat. According to Paul Martin at the University of Arizona's Desert Laboratory, these animals were pushed over the edge by the arrival of human hunters to this continent.

If the writer is trying to imply that hunting has a place in the natural world as we know it today, there are many who would agree. However, predators should respect one another and play fair. Hunters, along with environmentalists and government land managers, have to use good science in their arguments if they want to be taken seriously. As far as what the writer calls "the black bear problem" which he'd like resolved before grizzlies are reintroduced, well, problems are in the eye of the beholder. Many of us would consider this, along with the conflicts between mountain lion habitat and suburban development, a "human problem."

Susan Zakin, Contributing Editor  
Sports Afield Magazine  
Tucson

### Wilderness Trivia Question

What three mountains ranges are found in the Six Rivers National Forest?

Answer on page 7



## Opinion: Wilderness management

### How many are too many?

By Ann Lange and Charlie Morgan

How many visitors should be allowed to visit any wilderness? Managers of public lands wrestle with that question as they write their management plans—there is no easy answer. Management of the wilderness by regulating the size of parties and the number of stock allowed on a wilderness pack trip is a simplistic attempt to address the impacts created by uncaring or ignorant visitors. A single unknowing person (hiker or horseman) can do more damage and create more of a social impact than a party of 100 people that are well educated and know how to minimize their impacts on both the land and other visitors. Well-educated users regulating themselves is the goal managers should be seeking.

The Wilderness Act allows, with very few restrictions, recreational use by all. This reflects the view of all early environmentalists from Senator John Conness to David Brower. The bill introduced by California's Senator Conness, granting the State a tract of land including Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Big Tree Grove and signed by President Lincoln on June 29, 1864, contained the unique language: "upon the express conditions that the premises shall be held for public use, resort, and recreation and shall be held inalienable for all times." The Wilderness Act specifically allows for a primitive and unconfined type of recreation, with the use of wilderness areas "devoted to the public purposes of recreational, scenic, scientific, educational, conservation, and historic uses."

Aldo Leopold wrote that "the environment does not belong to humans: we share it and everything alive, and it is not something to be taken lightly." But he well understood the conflict between preservation and use. He wanted a functional wilderness "big enough to absorb a two weeks pack trip." Leopold mused about the man who lived in the city having "the opportunity to flee to the wilderness, throw a diamond hitch upon a pack mule, and disappear into the wilderness of the Covered Wagon Days, he is just that more civilized than he would be without the opportunity. It makes him one more kind of man, a pioneer." He also cautioned, "the time is almost upon us when a pack train must wind its way up a graveled highway and turn its bell mare in the pasture of a summer hotel. When that day comes, the pack train will be dead, the diamond hitch merely rope, and Kit Carson and Jim Bridger will be names in a history lesson."

David Brower recently expressed the opinion that the famous Sierra Club High Trips (150 people for two or three two-week periods traveling up and down the Sierra) should be allowed even today. He felt that the 65 or 70 head of stock required to support such a trip could and were managed in such a way that physical impact by the stock was negligible. The social impact of that many bodies could be and was concentrated in a very small area, and the total social impact minimized.

David Cole of the Forest Service is often cited as a scientist who feels that stock use is destructive to the resource. Much of Cole's work has been with impacts of campsites which is a problem of use by visitors with or without stock. For example, Mirror Lake on the Whitney Trail in the John Muir Wilderness has been closed to all use due to the severe damage done by campers over the years. Mirror Lake was never a destination for pack and saddle supported visitors. Timberline Lake, Bullfrog Lake, and the Kearsarge Basin in Sequoia National Park were closed for the same reason. Careless and badly informed people caused the damage, not pack and saddle stock. The Whitney Trail is such a management problem that consideration is being made to manage it outside any backcountry wilderness management plan. The trail has been closed to pack and saddle stock for over 25 years.

Pack and saddle stock use in Sequoia-Kings Canyon National Parks is about 84 percent less than it was in the 1930s and 75 percent less than in the 1950s. The average stock-supported party uses less than ten animals with an

average party size of four or five. Over 75 percent of the commercial packers' business today are trips where the stock does not stay overnight or graze on public lands. Most pack trips in the 1940s and 1950s were of long duration with large numbers of stock (up to 150 head). Common sense suggests that there cannot be much of a threat to the resource at the use levels of today.

Wilderness problems are caused by human behavior and how people manage themselves in the backcountry. Regulations setting number limits must be enforced to be effective. This enforcement is not only costly and probably not practical but trammels the visitors' wilderness experience.

It is time for all who love the wilderness to put aside personal preferences and prejudices concerning other users and join together to preserve what many of us have fought so many years to protect. Voluntary compliance by an educated, informed public is the minimum management tool to achieve wilderness objectives. Let us all join hands to educate, educate, educate our fellow user so that



An "improved" campsite on an archeological site in the proposed Caples Creek Wilderness, Eldorado National Forest. Photo by Jim Eaton

our progeny will enjoy the wilderness as we have. The alternative is to narrow the base of wilderness support to the point that such designation becomes politically unviable.

Ann Lange is chairwoman of the Public Lands Committee of the Back Country Horsemen of California (BCHC) and Charles Morgan BCHC's executive director.

## Wilderness Reflections

### Sequoia Solstice

By Canyon Fred

It was a long winter in the Sierra. Nearly everyone who lives above 5,000 feet had a full six months of the white stuff. So when the first days of summer rolled around, and my flatland buddies were headed to ski the High Route, I was instead looking for a nice hike.

My thinking was that there should be someplace where the snow had just melted off and the mosquitoes weren't out yet. Someplace where the creek crossings were high but the people were few. Someplace where I could camp on some good clean dirt.

Driving down U.S. 395, I couldn't help but notice that all the high places were still blanketed, and that a substantial number of vehicles included skis in their quiver of toys. I took some comfort, at least, in knowing that I had remembered my gaiters and ice axe.

Once I picked out a canyon, picked up a permit, and left the roads behind, it became immediately obvious that things were just getting started in the high country. Where the snow had burned off, grasses were just beginning to emerge. Wildflowers were absent. I paused to watch a clutch of down-covered nuthatches jumped cautiously from tree to tree, testing out their climbing legs and newfound wings in the protection of the understory.

My walk on dry ground didn't last long, and soon I was out in the exposed glare of a suncupped snowfield. After pausing to deploy my gaiters, sunscreen, and glacier glasses, I proceeded over the snow for some miles, made my way around a cornice, and descended into Sequoia National Park. A few more miles and I was on dry earth again. I camped above raging waters next to the Pacific Crest Trail and delighted in the solitude and the complete absence of mosquitoes. I mused that the latter two

conditions won't recur in much of the Sierra until September.

The following day I roughly paralleled the PCT, using a map to find my way over the snow. I didn't see a soul and thoroughly enjoyed the storybook foxtail pine forests and lofty vistas. I stopped to camp on a granite bench with a breathtaking view of the west face of Mt. Whitney. If it weren't for the continuous stream of low-flying military jets, you could have a real wilderness experience out here.

Watching the peak at sunset, I thought of a recent form letter from the Inyo National Forest that describes it's new policy for managing the Mt. Whitney area. It seems that agency personnel have finally decided that something must be done to address the extremely high level of use in the Whitney area that is resulting in ruined solitude, wildlife conflicts (conditioned marmots that tear into packs, tents, etc., looking for food), and human waste that peeks out from underneath seemingly every rock. The solution seems obvious and simple: reduce the hundreds of day users that attempt the peak from the east side each day. But the Forest Service won't implement the obvious because the merchants in Lone Pine want all the day hikers in town to buy maps, moleskin, and mosquito repellent.

So the feds propose instead to create a "special management zone" that will require, you guessed it, a special permit. Backpackers traveling through the zone, no matter how experienced, will now need two permits. Muir Trail hikers starting in Yosemite Valley will even have to inform the Park Service of the exact day they will be passing through the Whitney zone at the end of their trip. Get pinned down by a thunderstorm at Mather Pass and enter the Whitney zone a day late and you'll be committing a federal crime. In the meantime, the hundreds of dayhikers will still be crawling all over Mt. Whitney like ants, and the desk-bound bureaucrats in Lone Pine will pat

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## Ancient forests

# President Clinton signs logging without laws bill

continued from page 1

the National Forest Management Act, Endangered Species Act, National Environmental Policy Act, and every other law designed to prevent special interests from exploiting our public lands. Unfortunately, abuses still occur even with these laws in place, and often the only way to fight bad Forest Service or Bureau of Land Management (BLM) proposals is to bring the agency to court—but even this option has been eliminated by the rider.

This is a terrible blow to conservationists since salvage logging, even under existing law, is the most frequently abused form of logging practiced on our federal lands. This is largely because it is difficult at best to tell whether or not some trees are dead, dying, or diseased, much less whether or not they will recover. For example, 75 percent of the trees marked as dead or dying in the Grider Salvage Sale in the Klamath National Forest are still alive over five years after environmental groups saved them from logging. If the Forest Service had had its way, the Grider area would today mostly be clearcut. Under the salvage rider, such sales cannot be stopped.

It is estimated that the salvage rider will double logging on our national forest and BLM lands over the next year and a half. This is because the amendment requires that the non-salvage logging program continue in tandem with the lawless salvage. Since the sole purpose of the rider is to accelerate the flow of logs to the timber industry, the amendment makes it clear that federal land managers will be held accountable by Congress for any failure to maximize the number of salvage sales they offer.

Meeting the logging goals of the rider may be difficult in some regions, especially California. Few national forests can legitimately find large areas to salvage log economically. The Shasta-Trinity, Mendocino, Six Rivers, and Klamath national forests in particular will have trouble finding many dead trees to cut in their wet, hospitable climates.

While there are countless dead and dying trees in some Sierran forests (such as the Tahoe National Forest and the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit), most of these trees are of little commercial value because of their small size and (often) advanced state of decay. These dying forests are the legacy of past clearcutting during the last century's mining booms, more recent clearcutting since World War II, as well as the exclusion of fire. The Forest Service cannot make money cutting these trees (otherwise they would have done it already in many areas)—so they will have to spend millions of dollars to do it. Unfortunately, when the Forest Service loses money on timber sales, it often does not clean up the highly-flammable logging debris it leaves behind. This logging debris, coupled with the dense stands of young trees planted after clearcutting, are the principal fire threats facing the Sierra Nevada today. Ironically, the salvage rider was justified as an antidote to the danger of catastrophic wildfire. Even President Clinton mentioned this as a positive aspect of the amendment.

The rider was careful to help the Forest Service and BLM justify increased cutting even when it cannot legitimately be justified for "forest health" or other reasons. For example, not only are dead, dying, and diseased trees open to lawless logging under the rider, but trees that are likely to die, burn, or get diseases may also be logged. Activists note that all trees, like all people, are inevitably going to get sick, suffer accidents, or die, and thus the rider allows nearly every tree on our federal lands to be logged in the name of "forest health." The only areas exempt from logging under the rider are wilderness areas, national parks, roadless areas recommended for wilderness designation (only a small percentage of the nation's roadless wildlands are recommended), and other areas where Congress specifically banned logging in the past, such as national monuments and some national recreation areas.

### Forest Service and BLM procedures in limbo

So that the rider is not too great an exercise in anarchy, the amendment does require that the Forest Service and

BLM prepare environmental assessments and biological evaluations (a biologist's determination as to how a proposed project will affect threatened or endangered plants and animals) prior to logging an area. However, there is no way to ensure that these analyses are adequate, accurate, or meaningful, nor is there any way for the public (or even other government agencies) to challenge the conclusions of these documents.

Any requirements beyond these are solely at the discretion of the Secretary of Agriculture (when dealing with Forest Service lands) and the Secretary of the Interior (when dealing with BLM areas). According to the rider, these officials may require additional forms of analysis prior to logging but cannot require additional oversight from citizens or the courts. The rider concludes that any environmental documentation prepared prior to logging satisfies all applicable federal laws. However, the amendment does not contain any provisions to deal with proposals that do violate federal law.

A faint hope for conservationists is that Agriculture Secretary Glickman and Interior Secretary Babbitt will require public comment and extensive environmental documentation prior to allowing individual salvage sales to go forward, especially in ecologically critical areas. This directive also could be issued by the president, who assured the public when he signed the bill that the agencies would adhere to federal law despite the rider.

The effects of the rider will have to be highlighted in the press to keep it from simply being renewed next year. Conservationists feel that only if the American people wake up to this and other threats facing their public lands, can such destructive proposals be thwarted in the future.

What do we face losing over the next year while the rider is in effect? Every salvage sale we have defeated over the last few months may re-emerge, and every sale we anticipated appealing will go forward despite the damage

it will cause. Roadless areas potentially slated for destruction include Raymond Peak in the Toiyabe National Forest, Bald Mountain in the Tahoe National Forest, Polk Springs in the Lassen National Forest, Bonanza King in the Shasta-Trinity National Forest, and Tom Martin and Siskiyou in the Klamath National Forest. Logging these irreplaceable wildlands in the name of "forest health" is a tragic irony, one that should not be lost on those who support sound conservation policies for our public lands.

### What you can do

Write at the addresses listed below President Clinton, Senators Feinstein and Boxer, your representative in Congress, and your local newspaper to express outrage at the passage of the salvage rider. Tell them that you will not tolerate the squandering of public land for the sake of timber companies and other special interests. In particular, request that the president issue a directive requiring that all salvage sales conducted under the rider have extensive environmental analyses and full public comment periods, and that they avoid roadless areas, old-growth groves, and other sensitive areas.

President Bill Clinton  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20500

The Honorable Dianne Feinstein  
Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Barbara Boxer  
Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable [your Representative]  
House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

## Off-road vehicles threaten Los Padres wildlands

The Los Padres National Forest contains some of the most extensive tracts of roadless wild lands in California. It is the last refuge of the condor, and its habitats range from dry grasslands and chaparral to lush riparian areas, with hardwood and pine forests occupying its upper slopes. It is a region of great diversity in its climate, topography, and plant and animal life.

The Los Padres also is intensively used by recreationists from the cities of southern and central California. The heavy demand for wilderness protection and recreation in the region led to the designation of the Sespe, Chumash, Dick Smith, San Rafael, and Machesna Mountain wilderness areas, most recently with the passage of the Condor Range and Rivers Protection Act in 1992.

The Act included the unusual provision that an off-road vehicle (ORV) route through the newly-designated Chumash Wilderness remain open to vehicles until a replacement could be constructed. The act also specifically dictated where the replacement route would begin and end, thus forcing the Forest Service to consider not whether there should be an ORV route between these two points, but simply where the new route should be.

### The Badlands Trail

In the Badlands Off-Highway Vehicle Trail Project Environmental Assessment (EA), the Forest Service proposes to construct over 15 miles of ORV routes through Dry Canyon Wash, Sulphur Springs Canyon, and other areas. The route also would use nearly nine miles of existing roads to meet the Act's requirement that the replacement route link the Hungry Valley and Ballinger Canyon areas. Motorcycles and other off-road vehicles would be allowed to use the route, and the Forest Service predicts that over 2,300 vehicles will use the area annually. Up to four races and other large-scale events also would be allowed on the route with as many as 300 riders at a time.

While the Forest Service worked carefully in the EA to minimize the negative impacts the proposed route will have, the agency seems to have forgotten that the construction they are considering will occur in the Sespe-Frazier Roadless Area. Indeed, the EA fails to mention the roadless area at all, even though Forest Service regulations require that projects that may "substantially alter" the primitive character of roadless areas be analyzed in full environmental impact statements, not less comprehensive EAs. Conservationists contend that the construction of a new ORV route over 15 miles long certainly will alter substantially the roadless area's primitive character. Though Congress may have ordered the Forest Service to construct a replacement route for the one included in the Chumash Wilderness, this does not free the agency from the duty to comply with its own regulations.

In addition, the Forest Service failed to seek less destructive routes to follow, such as one paralleling the east side of Highway 33 (away from private property) and the Quatal Canyon Road. This would skirt the edge of the Sespe-Frazier Roadless Area and concentrate ORV impacts near existing highway and road corridors. To activists, road corridors are where motorized vehicle impacts belong.

### What you can do

Write to Mark Bethke, District Ranger, Mount Pinos Ranger District, HC1, Box 400, Frazier Park, CA 93225 by September 5, 1995 (letters must be postmarked by that date). Request that a route paralleling the east side of Highway 33 and the Quatal Canyon Road be considered in the final version of the Badlands Trail EA in order to minimize impacts to the Sespe-Frazier Roadless Area. Also request that at the very least, a full environmental impact statement be prepared prior to constructing ORV routes in the roadless area.



## Ancient forests

### Six Rivers plan

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#### Most areas receive increased protection

The LRMP designates some protective classification to the majority of the forest outside of designated wilderness areas and wild-and-scenic rivers. Once again, this is primarily the result of Option 9.

For example, an estimated 142,000 acres of riparian areas are slated for protection, as well as nearly 367,000 acres of old-growth reserves. While these areas are not completely safe from logging and development under the plan, they are immune from most types of commercial exploitation. When combined with areas set aside for primitive recreation, special interest areas (lands containing geological, botanical, historical, or other features of interest), research natural areas (botanical communities set aside for research and education), wilderness areas, and wild-and-scenic rivers, only about 139,000 acres (about 14 percent of the forest) are left for intensive logging.

Due to these land classifications and the comprehensiveness of the plan (most national forest LRMPs offer vague analyses at best), many conservationists are hailing it as the best forest plan in the nation.

#### Some roadless areas fail beauty contest

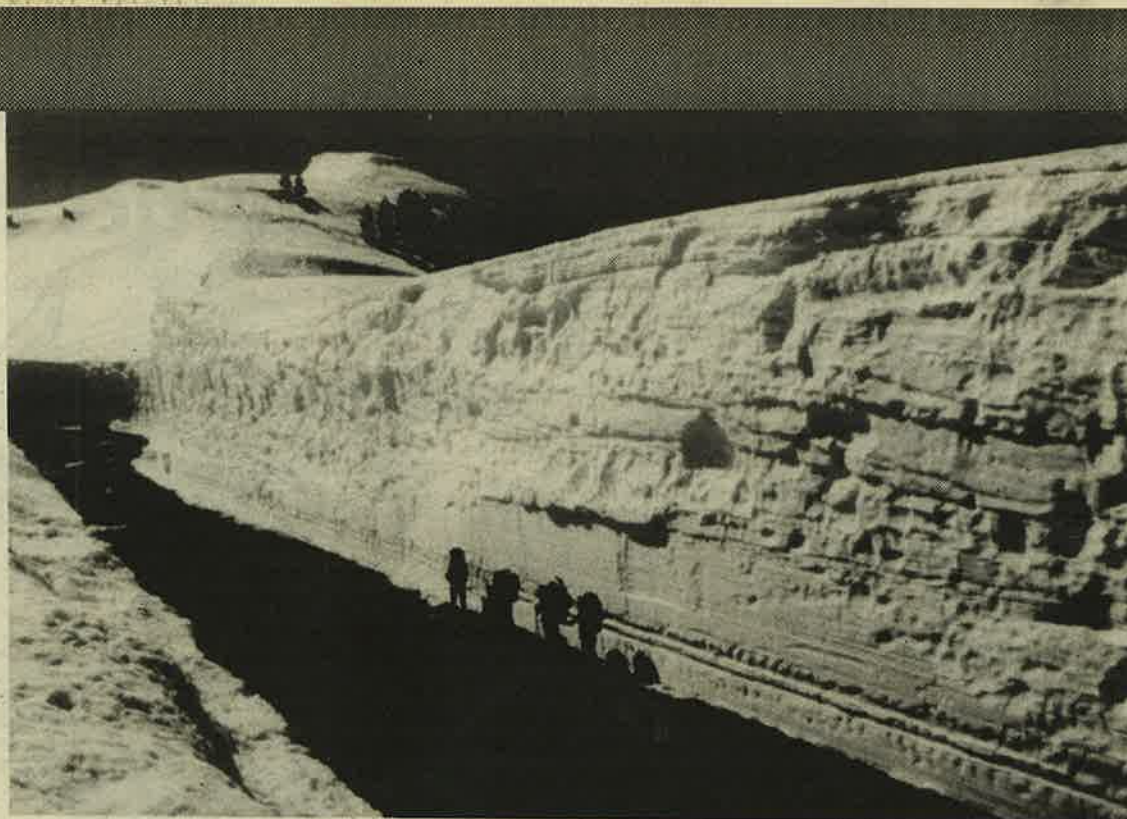
Despite these enlightened aspects of the LRMP, activists are perturbed by the plan's decidedly old-fashioned roadless area analysis. Taking its cue from a roadless area rating system developed in the 1970s, the Six Rivers LRMP examined the "roadless area characteristics" of the forest's 23 roadless wildlands using natural integrity, apparent naturalness, remoteness, opportunities for primitive recreation, and special features (striking rock formations, etc.) as their criteria for judging the overall value of these areas.

While this would appear to offer a useful way to assess the ecological health and recreational and scenic potential of roadless areas, the guide used to evaluate these qualities ranks treeless, high alpine areas with plenty of water as the height of beauty. Not only must the wild areas themselves fit these strict criteria, but surrounding regions must be fairly undeveloped as well. This is the same system used by the Angeles National Forest to deny protection to the Magic Mountain Roadless Area in part because the screams of people enjoying the rides at a nearby amusement park could be heard by hikers using the roadless area.

Using this method, the Six Rivers LRMP concludes that 13 of the forest's roadless areas "no longer meet roadless area characteristics." While this is certainly true for the two roadless areas in the forest that have been logged and roaded since they were first mapped in the 1970s (Pilot Creek and Monkey), it certainly is *not* true for the areas that simply fail the Forest Service's beauty contest. For example, the ecologically critical Mount Lassic and Big Butte-Shinbone roadless areas are deemed unworthy of protection for primitive recreation because visitors can see grazed lands within the roadless areas and roads and clearcuts in surrounding regions. Interestingly, the Big Butte-Shinbone area also received low marks on the beauty scale because of a recent brush fire and because of an old mine not in the roadless area itself, but more than a mile away in the Yolla Bolly-Middle Eel Wilderness.

While grazing and distant logging, mining, and road construction is certainly disappointing for those seeking pristine landscapes and perfect views, the Forest Service's assessment method ignores the fact that grazing occurs in most of California's designated wilderness areas as well as most of its roadless areas, and that there are few areas anywhere in the forested parts of the Golden State where evidence of roads and logging cannot be seen somewhere on the horizon. Most importantly though, the roadless area assessment system used by the Six Rivers almost completely ignores the values roadless areas have in maintaining biological diversity, watershed health, and other important ecological values. As for beauty, most conservationists find undeveloped, wild landscapes beautiful despite the human alterations visible outside of them.

To conservationists, there is only one true way to make a roadless area "no longer meet roadless area characteristics"—to log, mine, or generally develop it until it is so fragmented that it no longer qualifies for protection under the Wilderness Act. Thus far, as is mentioned above, only



Snow bank towers over hikers along the Lassen Volcanic National Park road. Photo by Eric Knapp

### Sequoia Solstice

continued from page 3

each other on the back for another ineffective program well done.

The next morning I decided to leave the snow entirely, and dropped 3,000 feet down to the Kern River. The snowpack in the Kern watershed measured about 200 percent of average this year, and I had packed my Tevas expecting a little high water. What I found in the canyon bottom, however, was a flood.

The trail was under three feet of water in many places, and I had the option of wading for miles or sharing the high ground with the rattlesnakes. I decided to avoid the vipers and follow the fish down the trail. It was slow going through often thigh-deep water, but I found the hiking (wading) in sandals to be surprisingly comfortable, and after a while even meditative.

My only encounter (other than the birds and the buzzworms) was an adventurous fellow on horseback. I wondered what his animals were going to eat with all the meadows under water. When his mule vacated its bowels with a splash, I thought about the thousands of manure piles and countless catholes (dug by humans) that were now part of the Kern River. All of the meadows and camp areas, after all, were completely submerged. It's times like these that you wish you had a water filter.

I shared some high ground with a king snake (non-poisonous) for the night, taking in the high canyon walls

and waterfalls as the moon passed overhead. Lying under the stars I thought about the fine folks down at the CWC, sweltering in the trenches to save these last tiny pieces of American Wilderness.

In the morning I left the park, and it was as if passing from day to night. The adjacent Forest Service land was littered not only with candy wrappers, beer cans, and fire rings, but also barbed wire, cow dung, broken plastic water pipes, and signs telling me what the good folks the Backcountry Horsemen are for maintaining all the wonderful fences. Make no mistake: the Golden Trout Wilderness has become a filthy barnyard mess.

I left the trail to get back to nature, and roamed cross-country the rest of the day, pausing for my requisite nap and to sit out a late-afternoon thunderstorm. I camped at a beautiful spring tucked in a foxtail forest, far away from everything and everyone. It was my last night in the wilderness (for this trip)—always a melancholy time. I reminisced about all the fine places I had seen, as well as a few of the eyesores. Although the Sierra seems a little less wild every year, it's all we've got. May all who read this do their part to save it.

*Canyon Fred send us occasional dispatches from his sojourns in the Sierra. His last piece was from the Yosemite/Hoover/Emigrant area (August 1994 WR).*

two roadless areas in the Six Rivers have met this fate, and mere aesthetic concerns will not deter the conservation community from fighting to stop development proposals in the forest's remaining irreplaceable wildlands.

#### Misleading statistics offered

The LRMP claims that over 90 percent of the forest's roadless areas will be protected. What it does not directly admit is that the 90 percent figure is derived primarily by excluding the 11 roadless areas that did not pass the beauty contest described above. Unfortunately, these roadless areas receive little protection.

For example, of the roadless areas that remain undeveloped but "do not meet roadless area characteristics," the plan will allow logging and other development on nearly 26,000 of their combined 69,000 acres. Particularly threatened are the Big Butte-Shinbone, Soldier, and Underwood roadless areas which could eventually lose from a third to half of their acreage to logging under the plan. Like most of the roadless areas the plan fails to protect, these wild areas are in the little known southern part of the forest, an area that, until recently, was virtually

ignored by the conservation community.

Full protection for these areas is important because the Big Butte-Shinbone and Soldier roadless areas are in the North Fork Eel River "Key Watershed," a watershed identified by Option 9 as being a critical refuge for salmon and steelhead trout threatened with extinction. Several scientific reports over the last decade, including one produced by the Forest Service itself, identified roadless areas as critical components in key watershed protection and restoration strategies.

Combining these unfortunate roadless lands with the roadless areas found worthy of protection yields a brighter picture. Overall, of the approximately 170,000 acres of roadless land remaining in the forest, nearly 126,000 acres will receive additional protection.

However, if "protection" is strictly interpreted to mean areas where little or no logging will ever be allowed, only 59,000 acres of roadless land will be preserved by the plan. Without wilderness designation of course, no roadless area is entirely safe from logging.

*Ryan Henson is the CWC's conservation associate.*



## Understanding fire

# The politics of fire

When the snow leaves the Sierra Nevada, fire season is upon us. Unless we can learn from the mistakes of the past, every fire season will be inflammatory: a time of fear, ignorance, anger, and blame. In this sixth installment of our series on understanding fire, we look at some of the constraints on controlling fire.

By John Buckley

Budgets are tight. Even when budgets were larger, though, fire fighting forces were insufficient to meet the extent of the fire threat in California. Now, with less money and ever-growing public expectations, Forest Service and California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CDF) fire fighting forces are stretched to the limit.

Over the past two decades, great numbers of homes have popped up in the middle of national forests or downslope from public lands. When fires start during extreme weather conditions, available forces usually are allocated to save as many homes (and lives) as possible. Consequently, public forest lands often are low priority for fire suppression. During extreme fire weather, that means high-intensity fires will consume large blocks of the forests.

So far, the Sierra Nevada has never had a major fire that killed numerous residents or fire fighters. But it is only a matter of time. When it happens, we can expect the media and politicians to focus on the "overstocked" fuel loads of the range. Environmental leaders and activists need to be prepared to deal with such an emotional situation.

In recent years, the environmental community has actively supported the controlled use of fire (in Forest Service lingo, prescribed burns) to underburn sections of the forest to reduce fuel loading and the threat of devastating wildfires and to provide greater levels of herbaceous regrowth for deer and other wildlife species. But prescribed burning, whether for fuel reduction or other reasons, is heavily constrained by air quality regulations.

Air quality regulations are especially restrictive for the Sierran national forests west of the wilderness areas that occupy the High Sierra, because air quality in wilderness areas is not supposed to be degraded below established standards and pollution in California usually travels from the west on prevailing winds. Wilderness areas designated before 1977 are supposed to have Class 1 air, the cleanest in the country. In the Stanislaus National Forest, 118,000 acres of wilderness is designated Class 1 under the terms of the Clean Air Act.

In the past, "smoke management" and air quality monitoring in the Stanislaus Forest has been minimal—just enough to satisfy the state Air Resources Board that implements the federal Clean Air Act. But as increasingly-tight air quality monitoring and regulations restrict when and where burning can occur, the "easy" solution of burning forest fuels to reduce fuel loading will become more and more difficult.

The biggest window for effective fuel-reducing burns in the Sierra Nevada comes in mid to late fall after there has been enough rain to make the transition from fire season to burn season. That window is not the same for all Sierra Nevada national forests.

The Plumas, Lassen, and perhaps the Tahoe national forests may get an early fall storm that soaks the soil, increases fuel moisture, leaves snow at the upper elevations, and effectively ends fire season. Yet that same storm may bring only traces of precipitation to the Sierra and Sequoia national forests at the southern end of the range, and intense, stand-replacing fires may occur there a month or longer after northern forests have begun laying off fire fighters and beginning their burn season. An even greater disparity exists between northern Sierra Nevada forests and the forests of Southern California.

The San Bernardino, Angeles, and Los Padres national forests sometimes remain dry as late as Thanksgiving, and



### Smokey, the Ranger's Friend

by Nancy T. Smuck

"When you go a-camping, conservation is the word,  
Protecting all the animals and every tiny bird;  
On wilderness about you all their very lives depend,"  
Says Smokey, the Ranger's Friend.

—courtesy of U.S. Forest Service

occasionally Christmas. When Santa Anas (east winds from the desert) blow hot, dry air across fuels that haven't been soaked since the spring rains six or seven months before, hillsides become walls of flames that devour homes and denude steep hills and canyons. These conflagrations can take every available Forest Service fire fighter, not just from the local national forests but from forests throughout the state, and sometimes all across the West.

Since fire crews must be ready to leave at short notice for Southern California's seasonal wildfires, the amount of prescribed burning that can be done in the Sierra Nevada

during the fall season is lessened. During years of low fire risk in the south, many prescribed burns can be done in the forests of the Sierra Nevada. But in years when fire danger is high in Southern California, fire crews are either committed to southern fires or standing by in case fires erupt.

One final constraint on prescribed burns to reduce fuels comes from escaped fires. If a controlled burn should get away from its controllers and threaten private property, the agency is legally and politically constrained to use all its resources to try to suppress the blaze.

So it's always safer for fire officials and forest supervisors to avoid burning the difficult-to-burn-safely fuels at the low and lower-middle elevations where human communities and national forests meet. Since fire suppression always appears heroic, the pressure to deal with the situation before fires threaten homes and private property is not as powerful as the incentive to take no risks and respond to "acts of God" when summer wildfires do burn.

In 1993 and 1994, years when large wildfires in the burned throughout the West and killed fire fighters, the Forest Service, CDF, and other local and regional agencies agreed that the fire threat in the Sierra Nevada is unacceptable. But not everyone can agree on how best to reduce the fuel loads in the Sierra and thereby reduce the threat of fire.

In 1994 the Forest Service released its Western Forest Health Initiative calling for salvage logging to reduce fuel loads on as many as 130,000 acres of national forest roaded areas and another 50,000 acres of roadless lands. During this same period, the agency's philosophy of "ecosystem management" has been translated by many national forest officials to mean large-scale thinning operations to keep the Sierra Nevada forests from being burned to a crisp. With a conservative Congress dominated by members who favor the timber industry, there is even more pressure to log.

Even the new plan to protect California spotted owl habitat in the Sierra Nevada has at its foundation the issue of fire and fuels. All of this pressure to log the forests to save them from fire means it will be difficult for environmentalists to stop ill-considered logging in the name of forest health unless they can agree on an alternative strategy for improving the health of forests and reducing fire danger.

John Buckley worked as a Forest Service fire fighter and hot shot before becoming director of the Central Sierra Environmental Resource Center.

## Let it burn!

By George Wuerthner

Although it is now being used as a rationalization for a wholesale attack on our forest, there is some scientific justification for concern over forest health. For years ecologists have been warning that the forestry practiced in the United States was degrading forest ecosystems. Western forests have suffered immense changes in stand structure from fire suppression, livestock grazing, and commercial logging.

Now the chickens have come home to roost. Trees in many forest ecosystems are experiencing accelerated die-offs from drought, disease, and insects. Forest fires are becoming more difficult to control. These are natural forces, acting just as starvation and predation do on a deer herd. They are thinning the forest of excess individuals and restoring balance to the ecosystem.

Despite the acknowledgement that our forest have changed for the worse, the very activities that everyone agrees contributed to the current situation continue, for the most part, unabated. We still attempt to suppress most fires. We still allow grazing in national forests and other public lands even though livestock eat fine fuels that help carry fire and their hooves compact soils, aggravating

drought conditions for plants. When we log, we still take the best trees out of the woods, leaving behind the genetically-inferior individuals or species like fir that are more prone to insects and disease.

Fire fighting has little impact on slowing or stopping blazes. Rather, it is a change in weather that extinguishes the flames. The 1988 Yellowstone fires went out not because there were 10,000 fire fighters tossing a little dirt around, but because it snowed on September 10.

I recall reading a 1930 report by a fire fighter who quipped that his crew battled a blaze for ten days and finally got it under control. According to his account, they "had a hell of a time breaking camp in the rain." Indeed, there is a lot of evidence to suggest that fire suppression is a waste of time under extreme weather conditions. We send out the troops just to put on a show, not because it has any real effect on fire control.

It is important to remember that large fires, like the 1988 Yellowstone fires, are not an aberration. In fact, they are the norm in extreme weather conditions. Our temporal and spatial scales are skewed; we should be looking at

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# Understanding fire

## Let it burn!

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the forests with the perspective of centuries or millennia—after all, that is the time scale of forests.

Large fires have occurred for thousands of years throughout the West, even when there was no fire suppression to contribute to higher fuel loads. Even ponderosa pine and other low or middle elevation forests where small understory burns (sometimes called "friendly flame") typically kill just small trees without harming most of the mature trees occasionally experience large, stand-replacing fires. In the low to middle elevations of the Sierra Nevada, a "friendly flame" kind of place, recent research by Tony Caprio and others has shown that historically, stand-replacing blazes occasionally roared through the forests, killing most of the mature trees as well as the small ones. However, it is important to note that fires typically do not consume everything in their path but leave a patchy mosaic with islands of unburned trees among the snags.

There are some good ecological reasons why we should promote, not interfere with, large fires. Fires produce snags for nesting birds and woody debris that creates habitat for wildlife on the forest floor and fish in streams. The heat kills some soil and forest pathogens. But only big fires are ecologically significant. The small fires that occur during "normal" summers make almost no difference in overall forest composition and structure. It is only when hundreds of thousands, even millions of acres burn that future fire hazard is significantly reduced. Instead of

fighting fires in drought years, we should be getting out of the way and letting it burn.

Now I know this sounds like heresy to people spoon-fed Smokey Bear propaganda, but our forests require fires—big fires—just as the rain forest in Brazil requires deluges, not just a sprinkling of moisture.

Even if salvage logging could lower fire hazard, the amount of fuel abatement necessary to have any real effect on the spread and size of fires would involve millions of acres. Logging a few thousand acres here and there make almost no difference. We just can't log the West fast enough to effectively reduce fuel loads in any significant manner.

**We should be looking at the forests with the perspective of centuries or millennia.**

Rather than trying to control fires and forests, we should learn to live with them. Big fires are like floods in rivers. They are essential to properly functioning forest ecosystems. We ought to treat fires the way we treat floods. Just as you shouldn't build in a flood plain, you shouldn't build where fires are likely. We should make insurance premiums higher for people who want to live in the woods, not subsidize their choice to live in a hazardous environment with government-financed fire protection. We should even think about zoning areas with high fire risk as off-limits for construction, just as we zone river flood plains. In the absence of zoning, we should do what we can to make communities and homes defensible: reduce fuels with logging and prescribed burns, outlaw wood roofs, and create good access for fire-fighting equipment.

Then, instead of wasting taxpayer money fighting fires or subsidizing salvage sales, we should let most of the fires in the West burn unrestricted except where they directly threaten lives or property.

*George Wuerthner is an ecologist and firebrand who lives in Oregon.*

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Not pictured but still available: our animal design by Bay Area cartoonist Phil Frank (beige or light gray) for \$12. All shirts are 100 percent double-knit cotton. To order, use the form on the back page.



## Calendar

**August 11** COMMENTS DUE on a Lassen National Forest plan to protect anadromous fish in Deer, Mill, and Antelope creeks (article in July 1995 WR). Send to: Leonard Atencio, Forest Supervisor, Lassen NF, 55 South Sacramento St., Susanville, CA 96130.

**August 17** EXTENDED DEADLINE for comments on the Forest Service's proposed changes to its National Forest Management Act regulations (article in July 1995 WR). Send to: Director, Ecosystem Management (1920), USDA Forest Service, P.O. Box 96090, Washington, DC, 20090-6090.

**September 5** COMMENTS DUE on a Los Padres National Forest plan build an off-road vehicle route through the Sespe-Frazier Roadless Area (article on page 4). Send to: Mark Bethke, District Ranger, Los Padres NF, HC1, Box 400., Frazier Park, CA 93225.

**September 11** MEETING of the California Ancient Forest Alliance in Redding. For more information call Jim Eaton or Ryan Henson at (916) 758-0380.

**September 17** MEETING of the board of directors of the California Wilderness Coalition in Davis. For more information call Jim Eaton at (916) 758-0380.

**September 23-24** WATERSHED RESTORATION WORKSHOP in Georgetown, sponsored by the Pacific Rivers Council. For more information call Terry Terhaar at (916) 444-8726 x 84.

### Wilderness Trivia Answer

The North Coast Range, the Salmon Mountains, and the Siskiyou Mountains.

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**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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*"Wilderness helps us preserve our capacity for wonder—the power to feel, if not to see, the miracles of life, of beauty, and of harmony around us."*

—William O. Douglas  
Supreme Court Justice

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