

WILDERNESS RECORD

News Journal of the California Wilderness Coalition

FALL 2005



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WILDERNESS
COALITION**

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The California Wilderness Coalition protects the natural landscapes that make California unique, providing clean air and water, a home to wildlife, and a place for spiritual renewal.

CWC is the only organization dedicated to protecting and restoring California's wild places and native biodiversity on a statewide level.

Since 1976, we have empowered local communities and conservationists to be the voice for wild California.



JIM ROSE

Rock formations in Joshua Tree National Park.

WILDERNESS RECORD

FALL 2005/VOLUME 30/ISSUE 4/ISSN 0194-3030

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Design by Maia Wilkinson/maia@maiawilkinson.com

When a National Forest is Your Backyard

Numbers just seem to collide when you consider the interface between people and the wild in California—especially in the south. Almost 15 million people live near one of the four southern California National Forests—the Angeles, Cleveland, Los Padres, and San Bernardino forests. Southern Californians enjoy these forests just as they do their own backyard. The 3 million acres of woods and chaparral offer a place to picnic, hike, fish, swim, and camp within a short distance of people's homes.

Considering their location, one would think that these are incredibly developed forests—more like city parks than federal wilderness. A map shows, though, that the Angeles, Cleveland, Los Padres, and San Bernardino forests are the last expanse of open space in southwestern California. The land teems with critters and birds—kit foxes, bald and golden eagles, California condors, and mountain lions. Moreover, 1 million acres—a third of the forests' total size—is “roadless” land suitable to be designated wilderness by Congress. This means that the land is wild and should be protected from development until further notice from Congress. In May, the Bush Administration repealed the Roadless Area Conservation Rule that provided such protection.

Now, the U.S. Forest Service has decided to open these pristine lands of the southern California National Forests to road building, utility development, off road vehicle use, and other development proposals. The entire state of California has 4.4 million acres of roadless lands in National Forests without permanent protection. With these plans, California could lose a quarter of its remaining unprotected roadless areas.

When the Roadless Conservation Rule was repealed in the spring, Governor Schwarzenegger said “I am committed to protecting the vibrant health and sustainable future of our forests. Roadless areas in California will remain roadless.” We must hold him to that promise. Please respond to the alert on page 6. This shouldn't be the last generation to fully enjoy the special parts of southern California's backyard.

Mary Wells is the Executive Director of CWC

Delicate ferns sprout from cracks in a rock face in the Angeles National Forest's Castaic Proposed Wilderness.



JIM ROSE



Drilling in Los Padres Approved

JIM ROSE



Located in the Los Padres National Forest, the Sespe Wilderness contains many fascinating rock geological formations caused by the dramatic uplifting of sandstone and shale beds.

This summer, despite years of public opposition, the U.S. Forest Service approved a plan to allow drilling on an additional 52,075 acres of public land in the Los Padres National Forest. It's an unfortunate decision for a beautiful landscape already subject to the direct and collateral damage of oil and gas drilling.

Stretching from Los Angeles to the Bay Area, the Los Padres National Forest is a wooded and chaparral-swaddled wilderness along California's central coast that is easily accessible to millions of Californians. The Los Padres is home to the endangered San Joaquin kit fox and the prehistoric California Condor, which is slowly reclaiming its habitat. Only a single California condor flew freely in the wild in 1987. Due to the aggressive Condor Recovery Program, there are now 56 condors inhabiting the Los Padres.

Despite its beauty and importance to wildlife, the Los Padres has had drilling for decades. The Forest Service's July decision is significant however, as it increases the land open to drilling two-fold. According to the agency's own estimates, a total of only 17 million barrels of oil would be produced over many years. This represents less than a day's supply of oil at America's current consumption rate. The Los Padres already produces more than its fair share of American oil at 700,000 barrels a year. Thirty-five million taxpayer dollars have been spent on bringing back the California condor from extinction—an investment not worth risking for such a small amount of oil. A coalition of conservation groups is appealing the Forest Service's short-sighted plan.

The Forest Service did listen to the public in one important respect. The plan prohibits drilling on over 100,000 acres of pristine roadless land in the forest. Unfortunately, the Forest Service has allowed drilling underneath and beside some of the areas using "slant drilling" techniques. While CWC is concerned about those exceptions, the decision not to drill directly on those wild lands allows them to still be considered for permanent protection by Congress. For years, CWC and its partners have been fighting first and foremost to keep any new drilling in the Los Padres out of its roadless areas until they can be protected as wilderness by Congress. Condors, kit foxes, and people will then enjoy the Los Padres forever.

The endangered California condor and San Joaquin kit fox both make their home in the Los Padres National Forest.



USFWS



ROGER JONES

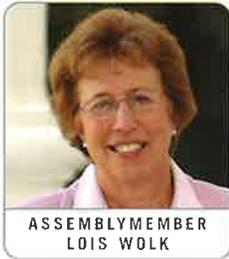


Cache Creek Wild!

On October 6, 2005 Governor Schwarzenegger signed a bill designating Cache Creek as a "wild and scenic river" which will protect 31 miles of the stream in Lake and Yolo counties from new dam construction and new water diversion projects. The bill was championed in the legislature by Assemblymember Lois Wolk (D-Davis) and it had bipartisan support in both counties and in the State Legislature.

Cache Creek originates in Lake County and flows through the heart of the Proposed Cache Creek Wilderness. It is characterized by deep canyons and steep ridges graced with oak woodlands, chaparral, and other important low-elevation habitats. The region hosts the second largest wintering bald eagle population in California, a large herd of rare tule elk (the world's smallest elk), river otter, and many other species. Cache Creek is popular with whitewater boaters for its gentle rapids and outstanding scenery.

The stream has long been the target of dam projects and water diversions. Assemblymember

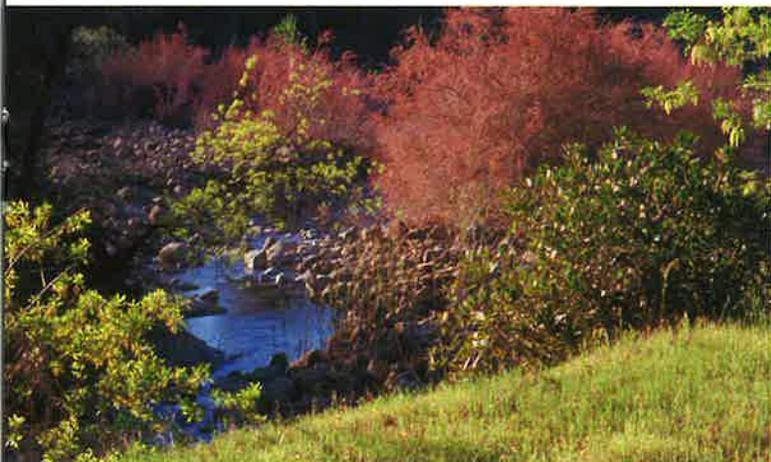


ASSEMBLYMEMBER
LOIS WOLK

Lois Wolk deserves a round of applause for her tireless efforts bringing together water development and agricultural interests, local officials, and conservationists to hammer out a compromise. The conservation

group Tuleyome spearheaded the successful campaign. CWC tips its hat to this wonderful example of great grassroots effort.

Recently designated a California Wild and Scenic River, Cache Creek is home to a diverse array of wildlife.



JIM ROSE

COALITION news

Volunteers Needed for Summer Fieldwork

The U.S. Forest Service (USFS) has launched an effort to map all off-road vehicle (ORV) routes in the state's national forests and to decide by 2008 which of them should be closed or kept open to vehicles. The CWC will be working hard to protect wild places through this "route designation" process, and we could use your help!

Next summer we will be surveying areas used by ORVs to document evidence of erosion and other problems that could convince the USFS to close as many routes as possible.

We could use your help with these surveys.

If you'd like to pitch in, please contact:

Brent Schoradt / CWC
1212 Broadway, Suite 1700
Oakland, CA 94612
(510) 451-1450
bschoradt@calwild.org

CWC Wish List

- Southwest Airlines Rapid Rewards free tickets
- Global Positioning System (GPS) units
- Gently-used office furniture

Welcome Brent!

Brent Schoradt is our new Deputy Policy Director.

Brent joins the CWC team after two years of managing open space protection campaigns for Greenbelt Alliance in Solano and Napa Counties.



As a fourth generation Californian, Brent is an avid hiker, bicyclist and backpacker with a passion for protecting the scenic coastlines, deserts, and forests that make California unique. He graduated with honors from UC Berkeley and has a Master of Public Administration from Columbia University. His mix of policy skills and grassroots organizing experience will be a welcome addition to the CWC team.

TAKE ACTION!

Earlier this year Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger promised to protect California's 4.4 million acres of national forest roadless areas after the Bush administration opened these areas up to road construction, unrestricted logging and other types of development.

Call and write Gov. Schwarzenegger before December 15th and ask him to *appeal* the Angeles, Cleveland, Los Padres and San Bernardino National Forest Management Plans. Remind him that:

- He promised to protect California's roadless areas.
 - The four southern California forests contain 25% of the state's roadless areas.
 - These wild lands are essential for the continued survival of hundreds of species of plants and wildlife, including the California condor.
- The Angeles, Cleveland, Los Padres and San Bernardino National Forests contain most of the remaining open space in the nation's most densely populated urban region.
- These forests, and especially their 1.1 million acres of roadless areas, provide unparalleled recreation opportunities and scenic vistas that greatly contribute to the quality of life we enjoy in California.

If you have visited these national forests, or better yet, if you have been to one or more of their roadless areas, tell the governor why these wild places are important to you.

You can reach the governor at:

The Honorable Arnold Schwarzenegger
State Capitol
Sacramento, CA 95814
PHONE (916) 445-2841 / FAX (916) 445-4633

Four Southern California National Forests in Jeopardy

In September the U.S. Forest Service released the Final Land and Resource Management Plans for the four Southern California National Forests.

National forests, like cities and counties, are zoned for various levels of development. The documents that describe these zones and what is allowed in them are called "land and resource management plans," (LRMPs) which must be revised every 10–15 years.

The Final LRMPs for Southern California's Cleveland, Los Padres, Angeles, and San Bernardino National Forests cover over 3,530,000 acres of land, including over 1,065,000 acres of unprotected and pristine wild lands.

These four forests are critically important because of their ecological diversity and precarious location next to some of our most urbanized regions. They host most of the remaining habitat for the California condor, kit foxes, and dozens of other endangered species of plants and animals, as well as most of southwestern California's remaining open space. The Forest Service was urged to release final plans that would provide adequate protection for the many ecological and social values that make the four forests irreplaceable. The agency's plans failed in almost every respect.

Most notably, the Forest Service rejected its opportunity to place those 1 million acres off-limits to development until Congress can permanently protect them by designating them as federal wilderness. The plan allows motorized vehicle use and development in the majority of the forests' roadless areas. This means that off-road vehicle use, road construction, utility development, and other development projects will be allowed in most of the 1 million acres of roadless lands. Instead, the Forest Service only proposed a mere 8% of those wild lands—86,000 acres—as wilderness.

CWC and other conservation groups are considering a challenge to the plans to protect one of Southern California's most vital natural resources.

The rugged Castiac Mountains Potential Wilderness, located in the Angeles National Forest, is at risk for road development.



JIM ROSE

Desert Communities Under Siege

The California Wilderness Coalition is working to stop illegal and abusive ORV use in the desert. This October, the Alliance for Responsible Recreation and CWC cosponsored the second Desert Communities Under Siege Off-Road Vehicle Conference in Victorville, California. Private land owners and other concerned citizens from across the desert gathered to hear from federal, state and local officials on off road vehicle issues including Daphne Green, Deputy Director, California State Parks Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation Division and Bruce Shaffer, California Desert District Associate District Manager for the BLM. Presentations were also made by the Student Conservation Association on methods for restoring illegal routes in the California desert and by Dave Van Voorhis, a registered nurse, on child safety issues and accidents.

These conferences have built a broad coalition to stop abusive ORV use in the desert. By sponsoring events in local communities, we're able to bring a wide range of folks to the table. Plans are already underway for the next conference in Ridgecrest in March.

Our efforts are leading to on-the-ground policy changes. San Bernardino County is considering an ordinance to address ORV issues on private and public lands. The County Planning Commission voted 4-1 in favor of the ordinance and it is tentatively scheduled to go in front of the County Board of Supervisors on December 13th. CWC is happy to see that the Supervisors will be meeting in Victorville for the first time, a part of the county that has been facing the growing problem of illegal riding on both public and private lands.

A strong ordinance in San Bernardino County will help solve the illegal ORV use problem on public lands often caused by the checkerboard of private and public lands in the desert. This ordinance is a direct result of pressure placed on elected officials by the Alliance for Responsible Recreation, CWC, and concerned citizens across San Bernardino County. CWC is pleased to see this draft ordinance moving forward and will continue to urge the County to pass a strong ORV ordinance.

For more information on CWC's desert ORV work, contact Jason Fried at (951) 781-1336.

Interview with Don Morrill

CWC BOARD CHAIR AND CO-FOUNDER



Most people have a childhood experience with the outdoors that stays with them for life. How did you become so committed to the California landscape?

I'm a fifth generation member of a California ranching family. We have family property on a cousin's ranch south of Ferndale in Humboldt County, where I spent every summer of my childhood. In addition, I first hiked the Sierra as a Boy Scout in 1959, and my early experiences in wild country engrained in me a love of California's landscape.

What was your involvement in the founding of the California Wilderness Coalition?

In 1976, Jim Eaton, Phil Farrell, Bob Schneider, Jeff Barnickol and I created CWC. After that I spent twenty plus years raising a family with my wife, Sue Barton, while working in the solar energy and travel industries. I decided to get involved with CWC again about 6 years ago. It is great to be re-connected with a growing, vibrant organization that is successfully doing the kind of work that we all envisioned when it started.

What do you think makes CWC stand-out?

We're the only statewide group dedicated to protecting California's enormous acreage of public lands. CWC has always served to coordinate the efforts of grassroots and national groups statewide. We're often the lead entity helping to direct conservation efforts since we know the entire state's landscape. In 1976, we fought to improve the inventories of roadless areas being conducted by the federal agencies at that time. In our 25th year, we conducted our own inventory and found over 7 million pristine acres of California's public lands that are still unprotected.

Since the Wilderness Act passed Congress in 1964, over 14 million acres have been permanently protected as wilderness in California. I'm proud to say that CWC had a significant part to play in every area added since 1976.

Classic Desert in the Turtle Mountains: Backpack Mopah Spring to Gary Wash

COURTESY OF STEVE TABOR, PRESIDENT, DESERT SURVIVORS

Trail name: Mopah Spring-Gary Wash Loop

Distance: 17 miles, 2 or 3-day backpack

Difficulty: Moderate

Features: The Turtle Mountains Wilderness near Needles is a great example of a classic desert landscape. This 2 or 3 day backpack loop shows the South Mojave at its best. The route starts from the east wilderness boundary and goes west up Mopah Wash to Mopah Spring, an important waterhole for bighorn sheep. Two brown volcanic crags, Mopah and Umpah, rise above the spring, which supports palm and mesquite trees. An old Indian trail leads west over a low pass into secluded Vidal Valley. Turtle Mountain Peak is on the high ridge to the west. Camping in Vidal Wash is easy. The backpack loop continues northwest over a low pass near Thumb Peak (3615'), another volcanic crag, then goes east down Gary Wash to the cars. Hikers can find bighorn and bird life at the spring, the threatened desert tortoise in the washes, and lizards and snakes in warm weather. Special treats include colorful rock bands, open valley vistas, petroglyphs, and a small rock house. A third day can be spent exploring Vidal Valley or the peaks without packs. Carry all water; leave the small puddle at Mopah Spring for the bighorns. No overnight camping near the spring.

Directions to trailhead: Mopah is accessed via a short dirt road going west from U.S. Route 95. Drive south from Needles about thirty-six miles and look west for a narrow two-track. It's obscure, but shows on both the AAA San Bernardino County map and the topo map for the area. If you pass a point directly west of Pyramid Butte on the east side of the highway, you've gone too far. Drive west in open desert on the two-track directly toward the Mopah Peaks, which show prominently. The Wilderness boundary is about three and a half miles. Cars can be parked alongside when the road becomes rocky. Mopah Wash is an easy walk from there.



Petroglyphs in the Turtle Mountain Wilderness.

COURTESY OF STEVE TABOR

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