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WILDERNESS RECORD

PROCEEDINGS OF THE CALIFORNIA WILDERNESS COALITION

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Henry Coe, Redwood Parks

Decision Time for State Wilderness

The largest proposed state wilderness outside the desert and the first redwood groves in any wilderness system are up for designation. The State Parks and Recreation Commission will decide on November 5 the fate of roadless areas at Henry W. Coe, The Forest of Nisene Marks, and Big Basin state parks.

At the present time, there are no state wilderness areas north of Ventura County. The three proposed areas also are among the few wild places close to the San Francisco Bay Area.

If enacted, these areas will become the first wilderness areas in Santa Clara, Stanislaus, and Santa Cruz counties. The nearest federal areas are the Ventana, Pinnacles, Point Reyes, and Farallon wildernesses.

The 65,214-acre wilderness proposed at Henry Coe will be the largest state area outside Anza-Borrego Desert State Park. The 8,270 acres of wild land at The Forest of Nisene Marks

and the 5,810-acre roadless area at Big Basin will protect the first groves of coastal redwoods in the state or federal wilderness protection systems. All areas are easily reached by residents of the San Francisco, Santa Cruz, and San Joaquin Valley areas.

While patterned after the federal wilderness system, state wilderness areas allow for roadless areas that have recovered from previous development. A state wilderness area is defined to be "an area of relatively undeveloped state-owned or leased land which has retained its primeval character and influence or has been substantially restored to a near-natural appearance..." The areas before the commission have a history of human use, including logging, but have recovered a natural appearance.

A public hearing is scheduled at the commission's November 5 meeting in Santa Cruz. Written comments on the

proposals must reach the commissioners by that date.

Following are descriptions of the three proposed state wilderness areas:

HENRY COE

The Pine Ridge-Orestimba Roadless Area consisting of 65,214 acres lies in the Mount Hamilton Range east of the Santa Clara Valley towns of Gilroy, San Martin, and Morgan Hill. It crosses the backbone of the range, with portions lying in both Stanislaus and Santa Clara Counties. It encompasses major portions of the upper drainages of three creeks -- Coyote Creek and the North Fork of Pacheco Creek, both of which drain west into the Santa Clara Valley, and the South Fork of Orestimba Creek, which together with its several tributaries within Coe Park drains eastward into the San Joaquin Valley. Most of the park is rugged mountain country, with vertical relief



Pine Ridge- Orestimba Roadless Area
Henry W. Coe State Park

reaching more than 2,500 feet.

The roadless area is remarkable in its ecological diversity and is an area of outstanding wilderness values. It presents a full range of the vegetation of the Central Coast Range. There are open sloping meadows and flats covered with wildflowers from January through May, heavily wooded canyons, river beds, wooded slopes, chaparral, and, on the highest ridgetops to the west, lonely stands of ponderosa pine.

Wildlife is abundant throughout the park. The large mammals found there are deer, foxes, coyotes, bobcats, mountain lions, and feral pigs. Golden eagles are regularly seen, and red-tailed hawks and other raptors are common. The park abounds with rabbits, ground squirrels, and other small rodents. Lizards and snakes are common, and sizeable fish are found in several reservoirs and in deep pools along several

creeks.

Scenery ranges from intimate views of forest and remote canyons to sweeping panoramas of the Sierra Nevada on one side and Monterey Bay on the other. In spots, one can look out over as many as five major ridge systems, all within the park. The North Fork of Pacheco Creek tumbles over a spectacular series of cascades in a remote canyon to the southeast. There is a lovely and equally remote waterfall on Robinson Creek in the northeast, and there are several other falls within the park.

NISENE MARKS

The Upper Aptos Creek wilderness proposal includes 8,270 acres in The Forest of Nisene Marks State Park, two miles north of the town of Aptos in southern Santa Cruz County. The proposed wilderness encompasses about four-fifths of the park and includes the upper watersheds of Aptos, Hinckley, and Bridge Creeks, and area

approximately 3 miles by 4.5 miles.

The proposed wilderness is largely covered by second-growth coastal redwood forest, the original virgin forest having been harvested between 1883 and the mid-1920s. The thick verdant nature of this forest and the area's topography, which is a succession of steeply sloped ridges and valleys, combine to offer many opportunities for solitude and primitive unconfined recreation.

Wilderness-seeking animals inhabit the park including mountain lion, coyote, grey fox, and bobcat. Steelhead spawn in Aptos Creek.

BIG BASIN

The West Waddell Creek Roadless Area recommended for wilderness classification includes approximately 5,810 acres of rugged slopes and canyons within Waddell, Ano Nuevo, Elliot, and Finney Creek drainages in Big Basin Redwoods State Park.



The Forest of Nisene Marks State Park

Photo by Alan R. Houser

Coalition Report

By Jim Eaton

This fall many conservationists have been working on a different type of campaign -- getting environmental candidates elected to local, state, and national offices. Precinct walking, phone banking, and money giving by wilderness supporters have been greater than ever in the past. We'll see the results on the evening of November 2nd.

This mid-term election is a crucial time for the environment. Many of us hope that election results will impress on the Reagan administration that citizens throughout the land repudiate the Watt-Crowell-Gorsuch proposals of the past two years. People will be voting on a number of environmental ballot measures and indirectly voting on coastal drilling, oil and gas leasing in wilderness, and mining in our national parks.

A strong "green" vote could stall the rumored blitz on the environment planned after the election. Many sources are reporting that the administration is poised with a number of incredibly bad anti-environmental measures, but that they have been afraid of a backlash by the electorate. We shall remain vigilant after the second of November.

A number of our supporters in Congress are facing tough elections. Phil Burton, Anthony Beilenson, Jerry Patterson, Jim Weaver, and others have tougher districts due to reapportionment. In a number of races, conservationists are supplying a significant portion of the people walking door-to-door and telephoning constituents. We look forward to seeing the results.

While all the electioneering is going on,

we still have some important wilderness issues this fall. Our front page story on the proposed state wilderness areas in three central California state parks explains the fantastic opportunity coming soon to protect new types of wilderness -- oak savannah and redwoods. This also may be the first time state wilderness has received much opposition.

As is often the case, local concern over fire and "administrative problems" (rangers like to drive their trucks) are surfacing on these wilderness proposals. Facts never seem to matter very much; some folks just can't bring themselves to utter the word "wilderness." But widespread public support for wilderness has overcome these few shrill voices in the past and will so again. So when you get our request to write a letter or attend a public hearing, please help!

The other major issue this fall is the proposal by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to undo the Desert Plan developed after years of study, millions of dollars, and massive public involvement. Here again is a case of the facts not jibing with some BLM officials' view of their mission to develop their domain. Therefore BLM is applying the James Watt Golden Rule: He who has the gold should make the rules.

By the way, we have not confirmed the rumor that Watt plans to rename BLM the Bureau of Livestock and Mining.

I hope to see many CWC members at the South Sierra III conference in Kernville the end of October. In addition to resource people mentioned in prior issues of the Record,

CWC members Mike Frome (author and now professor), Doug Scott (director of federal affairs of the Sierra Club), and the Walker Brothers (nine projector slide show of their hike from Alaska to Mexico) are on the program. This promises to be a really great conference.

We are welcoming two new business sponsors to the California Wilderness Coalition this issue.

Creative Sound Recording is the business of Michael W. Nolasco of Orangevale. Mike's graphics have long been an important part of the Wilderness Record, and we appreciate his sponsorship of the Coalition. He bills himself as prerecorded musical entertainment specialist for all social functions.

Mike McWherter, author and photographer, also has signed up as a business sponsor. His article and photos of the bighorn sheep of the Sierra Nevada ran this spring in the Record, and there is an article on the California Desert in this issue. Mike has become an important part of the citizen's network working on saving desert wilderness; his explorations are helping to refine our proposed wilderness boundaries.

Once again, three very important items for CWC members:

1. Vote on November 2nd.
2. Write your letter supporting state wilderness designation for portions of Henry Coe, The Forest of Nisene Marks, and Big Basin state parks.
3. Write your letter expressing your outrage over BLM's proposed amendments to the California Desert Plan.

Henry Coe, Redwoods

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The wilderness is located in northern Santa Cruz County 25 miles north of the city of Santa Cruz.

The West Waddell Creek Roadless Area is an area of outstanding scenic value where the forces of nature predominate. The area's size, although not necessarily vast, is expanded by its

ruggedness and dense vegetation which restricts travel through it. Trails are steep and narrow in many parts, and the topography of the area confines most views to landscapes which are completely natural, giving the explorer a real sense of isolation.

Animal species indicative of wilderness

are present in the proposed wilderness area. They include mountain lion, bobcat, gray fox, and coyote. Additionally, four species of special concern occur and one rare and endangered species may occur in the area. The secretive marbled murrelet may nest in the proposed wilderness.

Update

Senate Hearing on Mining Bill

A hearing was held September 23rd on S. 2801, the Wilderness Protection Act. The bill passed the House last August on a 340-58 vote.

The bill would withdraw wilderness areas and national forest proposed wilderness and further planning areas from oil, gas, oil shale, coal, phosphate, potassium, sulphur, gilsonite, and geothermal leasing. Bureau of Land Management Wilderness Study Areas are not protected, and the bill

does not apply to hardrock (metals and uranium) mining.

Energy Committee Chair John McClure (R-ID) and the White House said the bill was O.K. -- if "release language" preventing any more wilderness was added on.

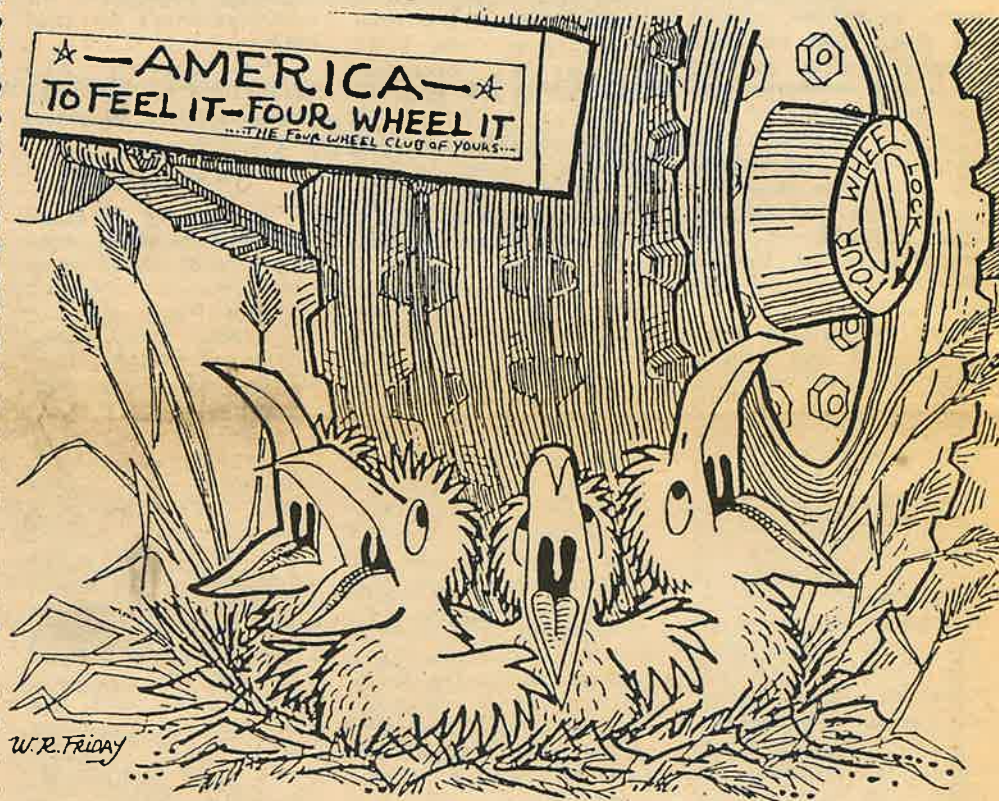
Bill sponsor Henry Jackson (D-WA) and Rep. Sid Yates ((D-MI) sidestepped them by adding a clause to the continuing resolution for the Department of the Interior (this bill keeps the agency funding at

last year's level past October 1 while the present year's level is still being debated).

The Yates language prohibits using any funds for leasing in the areas the Jackson bill would protect. So leasing is stopped -- until an appropriations bill is passed to replace the continuing resolution.

The final battle for the Wilderness Protection Act will take place in the "lame duck" session of Congress, after the November elections.

-Russ Shay



Coalition in Action

Prince Phillip Meets CWC

CWC Executive Director Jim Eaton was honored in September to be part of a small group of California environmentalists invited to a meeting with Prince Phillip of Great Britain.

The meeting was requested by the Prince to learn more about conservation issues in the state. Prince Phillip is head of the World Wildlife Fund.

Russell Train, past head of the Council on Environmental Quality, selected the dozen environmentalists for the

Los Angeles meeting.

A number of representatives of Coalition member groups were present, including Dave Brower of Friends of the Earth, Mike McCloskey of the Sierra Club, and Alice Howard of the California Native Plant Society.

Jim was able to discuss the California Wilderness Coalition and its activities for several minutes. Prince Phillip was quite sympathetic to the problems created by off-road vehicles, stating that snowmobiles were

quite a growing issue in his country. He then asked a number of questions about wilderness, expressing interest in the protection given, access allowed, and management requirements.

Towards the end of the meeting, Prince Phillip spoke about his concern over the large number of competing environmental groups in the world, and the need for close cooperation among the organizations through alliances and coalitions.

Wilderness Wildlife

Pileated Woodpecker

By Dennis Coules

Perhaps more than any other bird in California, the pileated woodpecker (*Dryocopus pileatus*) depends on substantial expanses of mature forest for successful reproduction. The presence of large snags (standing dead trees) and low human disturbance are habitat requirements that are becoming increasingly difficult to obtain.

The pileated woodpecker is the largest woodpecker in North America, with the exception of the possibly extinct ivory-billed woodpecker. It also drills by far the largest of woodpecker holes, and may be the sole provider of nest cavities for tree-nesting ducks such as the bufflehead, wood duck, and common merganser. The fate of the pileated woodpecker will also have consequences for many other species of birds and mammals which utilize its

abandoned nest holes.

Due to its large size, this bird is not easily confused with other woodpeckers. Coloration is black and white with a conspicuous red crest. Its distribution in California generally follows that of the coniferous forests which have at least 40 percent canopy cover. It breeds from the ponderosa pine to red fir zones in the Sierra. The other center of abundance encompasses the mixed-evergreen and Douglas fir forests of northwestern California.

Reproduction Requirements

Evelyn Bull and Charles Meslow reported an intensive study of pileated nesting requirements in the Blue Mountains of northeastern Oregon during the early 1970's. They found a total of 13 nests in a 28,000-acre area, all in snags with a diameter of

greater than 23 inches dbh ("diameter at breast height"). Pairs were found to range over a region of 320 to 600 acres while foraging. Western larch and ponderosa pine snags with broken tops were favored in this study. Other studies have reported nests in true firs and deciduous trees such as aspens.

Seventy percent of the nests were found in clusters of snags in the most dense forest types of the study site, despite a greater proportion of snags in the sparser forest stands. The trees surrounding a snag provide protection from weather and predators, according to the researchers. A pair excavates a new nest each year, thus clusters of snags provide nest sites in close proximity to the previous year's nest in addition to roost sites. Each pair uses three

snags annually: one for nesting and two for roosting.

The pileated's nests are drilled up to 1.5 feet deep at 15 to 70 feet above the ground. Nests may be discovered by searching for piles of large chips scattered all over the ground beneath the nest tree. Breeding occurs from March to early July with a clutch size of 3 or 4 eggs. The male often spends as much or more time incubating than the female.

Feeding Habits

A very large proportion of the pileated woodpecker's diet consists of carpenter ants, which are picked from dead logs. Wood-boring beetle larvae are also greatly sought. Fruits of manzanita, berries, seeds and nuts supplement the diet. Logs, stumps, snags and insect-infested live trees are all utilized

when searching for insects, but snags provide the primary food source after snowfall.

Look for four-inch-deep rectangular excavations in living trees



between logging rotations. The largest and most recently killed snags will last the longest, but snags that already have cavities should also be left for other, non-excavating cavity nesters. Such provisions for snag retention should be mandated in all timber sales and operations, whether on public or private lands.

Woodpecker-created cavities are important for a large number of forest inhabitants. In the Blue Mountains study site in Oregon, 22 species of birds and 24 species of mammals utilize vacated woodpecker cavities for nesting, shelter or hibernation. Knowledge of this interrelationship makes conservation of healthy woodpecker populations all the more important.

Further Reading

- (1) Hoyt, S.F. (1957). "The Ecology of the Pileated Woodpecker." *Ecology* 38:246-56 (eastern population).
- (2) Bull, E.L. and E.C. Meslow (1977). "Habitat Requirements of the Pileated Woodpecker in Northeastern Oregon." *Journal of Forestry* 75:335-7.

Dennis Coules is the Coalition's consultant for wildlife and desert issues.

WILD AND WOOLLY

WATT'S RIGHT MOVE: Busy as he is, Interior Secretary James Watt has managed to redesign the department's official seal. It now has a buffalo facing right against a mountainscape, instead of facing left. His office explained, "Since 1849, the Interior buffalo has been moving to the left...We are turning the buffalo around so he will move in the right direction."

- Econews

G-O Road Slowed

The Forest Service has delayed for the third time the opening of bids for construction of the last section of the controversial Gasquet-Orleans (G-O) Road.

No reason was given for the delay until November 1 of bid-opening for the six-mile-long Chimney Rock section of the timber highway. The latest delay effectively means that construction cannot begin until next year, at the earliest.

Bids were originally slated to be opened last August. Since then, the Northcoast Environmental Center, Northwest Indian Cemetery Protective Association, and a number of other individuals and environmental groups have filed a joint suit against

the G-O Road and against Forest Service plans to log Blue Creek in the Siskiyou Mountains.

Judge Stanley Weigel of the Northern District Federal Court in San Francisco is expected to hear the case.

The plaintiffs contend that the proposed Forest Service action would violate First Amendment guarantees of freedom of religion as well as a number of environmental statutes, including the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the Multiple Use and Sustained Yield Act.

An injunction could bar any construction until the legal battle, which may take years, is concluded.

-Econews

in pileated habitat, which can be up to three inches wide and six inches high. These are made in search of carpenter ants and termites in highly infested trees.

Conservation Status

The most important factor for the survival of the pileated woodpecker in California will be the maintenance of suitable forested habitat with sufficient snags for nesting, roosting and foraging. Preservation of legislated wilderness areas in pileated habitat will result in the most secure protection for populations, but even in areas subject to logging action can be taken to lessen the impact on this species and its associates. Bull and Meslow recommend that a minimum of 90 sound snags greater than 20 inches dbh be left per square mile in logged-over areas. Because snags eventually fall, additional numbers must be left based on the time



Gasquet-Orleans (G-O) Road

Photo by Jim Eaton

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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 California Desert

The Foxes are Amok in the Chicken Coop

A Supplement to the Wilderness Record - October, 1982

The Annihilation of the Desert Plan

By Jim Dodson and Linda Wade

Perhaps we should be inured to environmental outrages from the Reagan-Watt-Crowell-Gorsuch, *et al*, administration. But the newest attempt to exploit and destroy our California desert goes beyond anything we could have imagined.

Although faulty in some respects, the California Desert Plan of 1981 was at least potentially a sensible and balanced management tool. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) officials, in a disappointing and cavalier reversal, have developed a set of proposed amendments that would gut the plan's potential and doom some of the desert's most valued resources. Conservationists must rally to protect the gains that the plan promised and protect the areas now threatened.

This special supplement highlights the worst of these amendments as well as the best of a few that do merit positive support. There is no relative ranking among the bad amendments -- ALL are highly objectionable.

PUBLIC COMMENT ON THESE AMENDMENTS MUST BE RECEIVED BY BLM BY NOVEMBER 15.

Please review this summary. Don't put it down until you have written and sent your comments to:

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
California Desert District Office
Attn: Plan Amendments
1695 Spruce Street
Riverside, California 92507

You may obtain a complete set of amendments by writing to BLM at the above address.

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Proposed wilderness in the East Mojave National Scenic Area

Photo by Mike McWherter

Saving California's Desert Wildlands

By
Mike McWherter

The California Desert contains some of the greatest expanses of pristine wildlands in the West. It is a land where the magnificent desert bighorn maintains a delicate balance of survival on remote mountain ranges and the desert tortoise ambles across vast open spaces. Amid a world which appears bone-dry as far as the eye can perceive, there exists in little hidden pools the incredible pupfish - survivor from a prehistoric time when surrounding basins were one great fresh water lake.

It is a land where immense Joshua tree forests frame red volcanic cinder cones and abruptly

rising desert buttes, and the beauty of great sand dunes, eroded canyons, and flat mesas will take your breath away. It is a scenic and scientific treasure.

Conservationists have been working hard to convince the public and governmental agencies of the desert's fragile nature, of its slowness to heal from the scars of off-road vehicles, and the threat to its ecological systems and their wildlife forms from the growing population of Southern California.

Congress named the California Desert the California Desert Conservation Area (CDCA) in 1976. This land consists of some 25 million acres or about

one-fourth of the land surface of California. About 12½ million acres are public lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). Another three million acres are military reservations and 2½ million acres are national monuments and state parks.

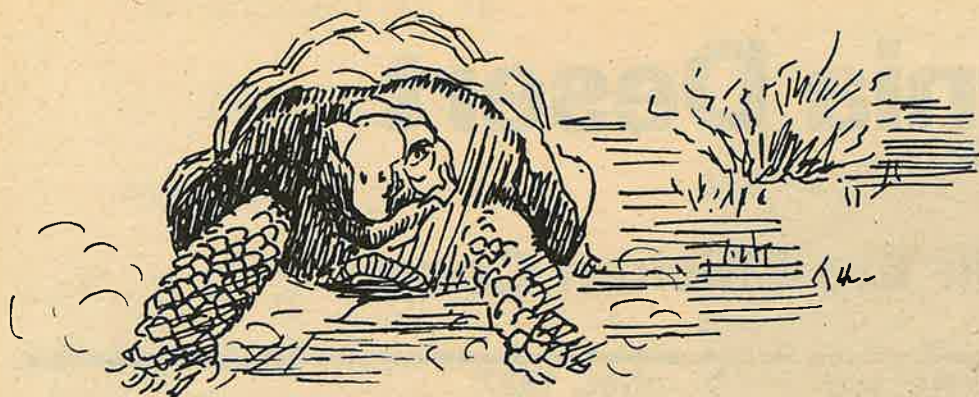
The management of the BLM lands is outlined in a large BLM document called the Desert Plan. The plan was adopted by Interior Secretary Cecil Andrus in 1980 and was approved for implementation by Secretary James Watt in 1981. The Desert Plan is especially important because precedents set by it will be used to manage

other BLM lands nationwide.

The BLM, as an agency of the Department of the Interior, is not only responsible for the CDCA but also for the conservation, management, and development of nearly 450 million acres of other public lands. This is twenty percent of the land area of the United States and sixty percent of all federally owned lands.

The BLM also has administrative responsibility for mineral resources on 369 million acres of private and other federally owned lands, and for approximately 1.1 billion acres of the outer

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continental shelf. The public lands are managed for multiple-use, including timber, minerals, livestock grazing, wildlife, watershed, wilderness, and recreation.

Studies by the BLM indicate that since 1968 the use of the California Desert has more than tripled. Much of the usage was found to involve recreational vehicles. In 1972 organized off-road vehicle (ORV) competitive events began to be managed by BLM. Sponsors of these destructive races were required to obtain special permits from BLM. An interim plan for the management of all recreational vehicle use was developed in 1974, and the BLM intends to modify the plan in the future as part of the Desert Plan.

In 1976 Congress established the CDCA with the goal of providing "for the immediate and future protection and administration of the public lands in the California Desert within a framework of a program of multiple-use and sustained yield, and for the maintenance of environmental quality." Congress noted that the California Desert was rich in natural, cultural, and economic resources and that these resources were "uniquely located adjacent to an area of large population."

THE DESERT PLAN

The BLM was required by Congress to

"prepare and implement a comprehensive, long-range plan for the management, use, development, and protection of the public lands within the California Desert Conservation Area." The deadline for completion of the plan was September 30, 1980. On October 1, 1980 the BLM issued a Proposed California Desert Plan and the final environmental impact statement.

The plan will guide the management, use, and protection of the CDCA for the next twenty years. A significant decision made by the plan was the recommendation that 2.1 million acres of the CDCA be considered for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System.

The plan also divided the desert into four multiple-use classes ranging from wilderness protection to intensive development. Each class calls for a different balance of development and protection. The classes are:

Controlled or Class "C"

This class is used for recommended wilderness areas and gives the desert its best protection. About 17 percent of the BLM desert lands are in this class.

Limited or Class "L"

This class is used to protect sensitive areas and resources that are not recommended for wilderness, but still allows many destructive uses. About 49 percent of the desert is in this class.

Moderate or Class "M"

Almost all multiple-use activities can occur in this class. Some of the more destructive activities would be mining and ORV races. About 27 percent of the desert is in this class.

Intensive or Class "I"

This class allows all multiple use activities with emphasis on development and such activities as ORV free play areas. About four percent of the desert is in this class.

The desert's many resources are managed according to these classes. The resources are called "elements" in the plan. The elements are: wildlife, wilderness, desert culture, wild horses and burros, livestock grazing, recreation, energy, minerals, power corridors, land-tenure, motorized vehicle access, vegetation, and Native American values. The wilderness element would thus be managed under Class "C" guidelines. The recreation element could span the whole gamut, from class "C" to class "I."

DESERT WILDERNESS

Within the CDCA the BLM determined that 137 different areas, totaling 5.7 million acres, had wilderness characteristics. These areas were designated as Wilderness Study Areas (WSA's). Each area was studied by the BLM for its suitability or non-suitability for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System.

From this study process 45 WSA's, totaling 2.1 million acres, became preliminarily recommended as suitable for wilderness designation by Congress. The BLM sends its recommendations to the Secretary of the Interior, who sends his recommendations to the President, who then sends his recommendations to Congress for final action.

Only Congress can designate an area as wilderness. The BLM legally has until October 21, 1991, to finish its reporting phase on desert wilderness. However, the BLM will be attempting to complete this process for high-priority areas by 1985.

A point of concern to conservationists is that the BLM does not plan to manage any of the recommended wilderness areas by Class "C" guidelines until after they are designated as wilderness by Congress. This policy would leave many potential wilderness areas open to impairment of the very qualities which make them suitable for wilderness.

OFF-ROAD VEHICLES

Abuse by ORV's is one of the most serious problems since they cause extensive damage of desert lands and destruction of wildlife habitat. ORV's should be brought under greater control, but the plan leaves much of the desert open to their continued devastation. Over 30 percent of the desert is open for ORV use on existing routes of travel, which includes not only roads but washes, trails, and in some cases merely the track where a previous ORV traveled. Only legitimate and needed routes of travel should be permitted.

THE EAST MOJAVE

An area of special scenic quality in the CDCA lies in the Mojave Triangle - the region between the two freeways, Interstates 15 and 40, and the Nevada border. To give these lands the protection they deserve, a bill was

introduced in 1979 which would establish the Mojave National Park and within it a number of wilderness areas. Largely because of this effort the BLM declared 1.38 million acres a National Scenic Area. It is the first scenic area for the BLM.

The scenic area, as part of the Desert Plan, is BLM's attempt to prove that it can preserve the area's wilderness, cultural, and recreational resources while still permitting such traditional uses as mining and cattle grazing.

Within the Scenic Area are the Providence, Granite, New York, and Piute mountains, Kelso Dunes, and the Cinder Cones. These areas are among the 45 WSA's which BLM has determined are suitable for further wilderness study. They also are the finest examples of their particular habitat in California, supporting over 700 species of plants and nearly 300 species of wildlife. BLM has called the scenic area and these wilderness areas the "Gem of the California Desert."

A large number of mining claims exist in the Scenic Area and in wilderness areas proposed by the BLM. Particularly alarming to conservationists are the mining activities at Kelso Dunes (magnetite) and at Cinder Cones (cinder and germanium). Under the Desert Plan these areas could be mined even if they become wilderness areas. Only the Secretary of the Interior or Congress could withdraw them from mining.

PLAN AMENDMENTS

To permit the BLM to respond to new information and changing circumstances, the Desert Plan included provisions for amendments [see accompanying articles for recent proposals]. According to the BLM there are basically four considerations which could start amendment action:

- (1) A new issue with supporting rationale,
- (2) New data on an existing issue,

- (3) New plans by local governments which are compatible with the Desert Plan, and
- (4) New legal mandates from Congress.

Amendments can be minor or major. The annual review process began in 1981, when the first review was completed. Secretary Watt stated, "the plan commits BLM to an annual review of the situation in the CDCA. This annual review will allow consideration of policy changes and accommodation of new uses and demands on a regular basis...It is a dynamic plan and contains within it the mechanisms for amendment as necessary."

A watchful eye must be kept on this change process as it can be used to help or harm not only the desert wilderness, but many other fragile desert resources.

The California Desert Conservation Area has wilderness qualities that must be protected from the onslaught of destructive and insensitive interests. We not only owe this effort to ourselves, but to unborn generations that would share the marvel of discovering the desert's unscarred, pristine beauty and the diverse life forms that inhabit it.

We have worked hard for wilderness protection in the California Desert, and the Desert Plan provides a framework for which this work can continue. But because the amendment process of the plan is indeed as Watt states "dynamic," forces unfriendly to wilderness will try to use it to their advantage. Conservationists are going to have to work harder than ever before if they wish to see California's desert wildlands become part of the National Wilderness Preservation System.

Mike McWherter is a professional photographer and author who lives in Oxnard.



Photo by Jim Eaton

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Amendment No. 5

Panamint Dunes Wilderness

BLM proposes to open Panamint Dunes to dune buggies. They plan to open the northern portion of the dunes system (Panamint Dry Lake -- including the surrounding shoreline and Lake Hill area) to provide this "recreational opportunity" to a few dozen enthusiasts.

In doing this, BLM will cut 10,550 acres out of the heart of one of the finest, most varied wilderness candidates in the Mojave Desert. Off Road Vehicle (ORV) use here will cause permanent damage to an extremely rich and world-famous

archeological area. Essential habitat for sand-dwelling species will be lost as well as research opportunities.

In accepting Amendment 5, BLM will be acting to destroy most of the area's wilderness character -- and that violates BLM's own Interim Management Policy (IMP) for candidate wilderness areas.

BLM offers no solid rationale for accepting this amendment. We must object to the ridiculous sacrifice of this area to provide a source of fun for an exclusive few.



The Barstow to Las Vegas motorcycle race, a "race to end all deserts,"

Amendment No. 6

Barstow/Vegas Motorcycle Race

The Barstow to Las Vegas motorcycle race, aptly called a "race to end all deserts," was last run in 1974. In size, style, and route it symbolized the worst of off-road racing, and BLM itself came to the conclusion in 1975 that the race should no longer be run. BLM is now proposing to begin it again. Conservationists are outraged!

When released, the Desert Plan included the last-minute addition of three race courses. We were given explicit assurance that these three courses were meant to resolve the Barstow/Vegas problem, and that there would not be this current move to add the Barstow/Vegas race.

Your comments should

object to this betrayal and make clear your continuing opposition to this event.

The proposed size, 1,200 riders, makes it three times as large as the largest race that BLM now permits (the Johnson Valley/Parker race). We have no confidence that either BLM or the race sponsors can keep it from becoming a disaster -- especially in view of the continuing management problems they have in running Johnson Valley/Parker.

The race route avoids obvious sensitive points (Afton Canyon, Cronese Basin, and at least the summit of Clark Mountain), but this entire area is one of the richest parts of the Mojave Desert. It is impossible to run any

challenging off-road event through it without causing disastrous effects.

The race course criss-crosses the willow thickets of the Mojave Sink. It crosses or runs along the natural boundaries of five Wilderness Study Areas in obvious violation of BLM's Interim Management Policy for Wilderness. And it utilizes the entire

northern boundary of the Halloran Wash ACEC (Area of Critical Environmental Concern) which is recommended for expansion in another amendment.

All in all, the race remains an environmental atrocity. BLM's efforts to make it seem otherwise simply don't work. They deserve your condemnation.



Amendment No. 7

Razor Open Area

As predicted by conservationists, BLM is having management problems with the Razor Open Area. This open area was a last-minute attempt to legitimize a traditional off-road recreation area. In order to avoid the area's rich archeological remains and wildlife habitat, BLM had to draw restrictive boundaries. Now that it is obvious that BLM's plan is unworkable, three plans are being considered to "solve" the problem.

Alternative A (submitted by BLM) triples the open area by moving boundaries to the north and west to include the entire Mojave Sink all the way to the east end of Afton Canyon.

Alternative B calls for a major expansion to the east to include most of the sandy expanse of Devil's Playground and southern Soda Lake.

Alternative C (submitted by conservationists) would close the open area and reclassify it for moderate use (Class M).

BLM proposes to accept its own amendment, Alternative A. By compounding its original error, BLM will sacrifice thousands more acres of superb mesquite and desert willow habitat, destroy numerous additional archeological sites, and intensify the threat to the adjacent Mesquite Hills/Crucero ACEC by increasing the overall level of ORV use.

Your comments should object to the Razor Open Area and strongly endorse Alternative C. This will eliminate most of the resource impacts resulting from the open area but will allow a moderate level of recreational use to continue.

Amendment No. 30

Woods Mountains Wilderness

The Woods Mountains, 11,520 acres in the heart of the East Mojave National Scenic Area, are outstanding: lots of wildlife (including bighorn sheep), rich and varied vegetation, one of the finest archeological complexes in the East Mojave, and striking scenery with excellent hiking, backpacking, and other recreational opportunities.

Support for this amendment to add Woods Mountains to BLM's list of recommended wilderness areas came from environmentalists, from local residents and

landowners, and even from BLM itself (the Needles Resource Area Office). Of all the areas not now recommended, the Woods Mountains possess the highest wilderness qualities with the least management problems.

BLM has chosen to reject this amendment without any clear explanation, other than an implied position that there is no need for more wilderness.

Your comments should stress the outstanding wilderness quality of the area, and urge them to accept Amendment 30.

Amendment No. 14

Grazing Rules

If accepted, this amendment would eliminate two key criteria used in determining the carrying capacity of grazing allotments: the distance of forage from water, and the degree of slope of terrain. BLM management says the criteria are "not applicable to California desert grazing situations." Just the reverse is true. Grazing is proportional to available water. Cows will trail up a hillside after first using the forage on the less steep slopes.

BLM's own staff-evaluation of Amendment 14 says: "...it would remove the rule-of-thumb guidelines for determining the available amount of suitable range that assures proper utilization of forage adjacent to water sources and on the

gentle slopes of ranges."

BLM's staff evaluation of the impacts of rejecting Amendment 14 says: "...there would be very little impact on current livestock operations in the California Desert...It is the professional judgement of BLM range personnel that within the CDCA, gentler slopes areas adjacent to water are receiving proper utilization under this criteria, and that these standards may actually be somewhat liberal during the majority of the year."

In light of the staff comment, the reason for positive consideration of this amendment is inexplicable. Express your concern about this proposal that violates both sound range management and the dictates of common sense.

Amendment No. 18

East Mojave

National Scenic Area

The East Mojave National Scenic Area was a late addition to the Desert Plan. It was BLM's attempt to subdue a growing movement to establish an East Mojave National Park by promising a high level of management effort within the boundaries of the proposed park.

Park supporters agreed to give BLM a chance to show what they could do. The results have not been promising: first the adoption of management principles so vague as to be meaningless, and now the proposed amputation of the area's spectacular northeastern corner.

Union Oil's Molycorp offered this amendment (Molycorp owns Mountain Pass Mine on the south side of Clark Mountain). It would delete the highest peak in the Mojave, Clark Mountain, with its fascinating white fir forest, and eliminate the Ivanpah Mountains south of Interstate 15.

These areas abound in recreational opportunities, beautiful stands of cactus and Joshua trees, spectacular rock outcroppings and scenic vistas, and they are an essential part of the East Mojave's unique array of natural values.

National Scenic Area management guidelines have already been written so as to have no impact on Molycorp's mining operations -- other than to provide some pressure for scenic mitigation.

National Scenic Area status also has no impact on the proposed construction of a power plant in Ivanpah Valley along Interstate 15 on the area's extreme northeast border.

Indeed, none of BLM's stated reasons for this amendment make sense. Reducing the size of the scenic area to avoid imagined, possible conflicts is not an appropriate way to manage public land.

Amendment No. 34

Bighorn Mountains Wilderness

This is a BLM proposal to delete 13,600 acres in the eastern Bighorn Mountains from wilderness recommendation. This beautiful hiking area, stretching a dozen miles along the northeast foothills of the San Bernardino Mountains, remains essentially untouched by humanity.

This area is too near Los Angeles to have escaped the off-road

vehicle. In seeking to inventory every goat track, BLM has lost the ability to distinguish between degrees and nature of such use. The area does have jeep tracks up many of its canyons. When mapped, the "road" network looks impressive but on the ground it is quite unobtrusive.

There are no major mining developments in

the area, and there is outstanding potential for such development. There are a number of small mining claims -- most of these are long inactive and many of the rest are more recreational than mineral, and would not meet any validity exam. These claims do not significantly impact the wilderness quality of the area.

BLM seems mainly

concerned with the manageability of the area. Its outstanding access, scenic diversity, and recreational opportunities make it one of the most attractive wilderness candidates in the western Mojave. Stress this in your comments, and urge that wilderness designation for the area is well worth the additional management effort.

Amendment No. 51

Sheephole Mountains Wilderness

The Sheephole Mountains Wilderness is the second largest block of land recommended by BLM for designation. Designation would protect the sole remaining undisturbed valley in the central California Desert.

Sheephole Valley, and the adjacent Sheephole and Calumet Mountains, has long been a preservation priority for conservationists. It

presents the magnificent open beauty unique to desert wilderness. Both the Sheephole and Calumet Mountains offer excellent wilderness recreation opportunities with good hiking and climbing routes and rugged, scenic vistas.

Claiming poor quality for wilderness (i.e., "there's nothing there"), and that checkerboard landownership in the

north makes management difficult, BLM now proposes to delete this recommendation. The real reason seems to be Phillips Petroleum's desire to seek geothermal resources in the area.

In your comments, stress that the "nothing" is its real wilderness resource, and that Sheephole Valley is the heart and soul of this unique wilderness. The

checkerboard land is largely Southern Pacific-owned, joint management is possible, and acquisition by land exchange should be a priority. Sheephole Valley is not a likely site for good geothermal resources (BLM's own analysis), and the area's importance as wilderness far outweighs its marginal energy potential.

Clark Mountain would be deleted from the East Mojave National Scenic Area

Amendments No.'s 28, 29 39, and 52

Inyo County Wilderness Deletions

These four amendments are the worst of a group submitted by Inyo County on a single theme: the deletion of BLM recommended wilderness (Class C land) based entirely on their supposed mineral values.

The final Desert Plan included an appraisal of known/estimated mineral resources based on then available information. Inyo County has used these appraisals as their sole justification for demanding deletions, thus defeating the orderly process called for by law.

BLM's initial inventory and interim recommendations were made using all applicable criteria except for mineral resources. Minerals data is to be the final piece of the equation -- it is to come from mineral studies done by the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) before BLM's wilderness recommendations are made to Congress.

The Catch 22 in that BLM is only having the USGS studies done on BLM recommended areas. These amendments --

supposedly based on mineral values -- will prevent these areas from having the final mineral study done on them.

† The cost is great, the benefits small. 1,710 acres of bighorn sheep and golden eagle habitat in the Nopah Range would be given over to "medium use." (Amendment 28)

† Over 29,000 acres of Resting Springs Range, with dense archeological values and outstanding wilderness quality, would be lost. (Amendments 29 & 39)

† Over 35,000 acres

of the Greenwater Valley would be withdrawn from Class C. (Amendment 52). This would eliminate wilderness in a scenic range and valley that share a fifteen-mile boundary with administratively endorsed wilderness in Death Valley National Monument.

Except for a small developed area at Shaw Mine in the Nopah Range, these areas have no known mineral resources of any significant value. Indeed, the only potential minerals of any medium or high possibility are some borate deposits (which are found throughout eastern Inyo and Kern counties) in the Resting Springs Range.

The principle gain of this sacrifice of protection of public lands is the political gain to BLM for satisfying the mineral interests that support the Reagan administration.

The Most Supportable Plan Amendments

There are a few good decisions being made by BLM in this amendment cycle. We should make our support for them clear.

You should express approval of BLM's decision to improve its ACEC program by:

† establishing a new ACEC for Big Sand and Little Sand Springs north of Death Valley (Amendment 15),

† relocating the Eriophylum ACEC north of Harper Dry Lake to a more suitable location to protect this endangered plant species (Amendment 16), and

† expanding the Halloran Wash ACEC to cover a much larger area of high archeological values (Amendment 17).

You should applaud BLM's rejection of two disastrous wilderness deletions:

† Amendment 41 would have dropped the Little Lake Canyon area on the desert side of the Kern Plateau.

† Amendment 42 would have deleted Hunter Mountain to permit increased grazing and mining development.

Both of these areas are among the very finest of BLM's initial recommendations. Any decision other than rejection of these amendments would have indicated BLM's total abandonment of its wilderness program.

Jim Dodson is a Sierra Club and Desert Protective Council leader. Linda Wade is the Club's Associate Southern Representative.