

STATE OF THE WILD

JANUARY 2004

"If future generations are to remember us with gratitude rather than contempt, we must leave them more than the miracles of technology. We must leave them a glimpse of the world as it was in the beginning, not just after we got through with it."

President Johnson, on signing the Wilderness Act, September 3, 1964

This year will mark the 40th anniversary of the Wilderness Act, a conservation beacon which has been used to build the nation's National Wilderness Preservation System to its current 106 million acres across 44 of our states. Soon, we will be hearing about the State of the Union, so it is an appropriate time to reflect on the *State of the Wild*.

Today, less than 5 percent of America's land is permanently protected as wilderness for future generations to use and enjoy. Outside of Alaska, only 2.5 percent of the land is protected.

Seven of every eight acres of America's wild land remains at risk of irreversible damage.

Across the nation, citizens are working to see that more of America's special wild places are preserved just as they are. A number of key wilderness bills are now pending in Congress, with additional proposals likely this session.

PENDING AND EXPECTED WILDERNESS LEGISLATION

ALASKA

The **Morris K. Udall Wilderness Act** (H.R. 770), introduced by Reps. Ed Markey (D-MA) and Nancy Johnson (R-CT) would designate as wilderness the fragile 1.5 million-acre Coastal Plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

The **Alaska Rainforest Conservation Act** (H.R. 979) was introduced by Rep. Rosa DeLauro (D-CT) with 101 cosponsors. This measure would permanently protect the remaining wildlands of the Tongass and Chugach National Forests, to provide for hunting, fishing, recreation and tourism.

ARIZONA

This month, Rep. Raul Grijalva (D-AZ) announced plans to introduce a wilderness bill that would protect nearly 85,000 acres south of Tucson and west of the Santa Cruz River. The Tumacacori Highlands are known for their spectacularly eroded,

lichen-drenched cliffs and undulating hills of grass and madreaan oaks. The area is an exceptional arena for the intermingling of sub-tropical and northern plant and animal species, many of which are rare and do not exist anywhere else in the United States.



photo by Trevor Hare

CALIFORNIA

The **California Wild Heritage Act** (S. 1555), introduced by Sen. Barbara Boxer (D-CA), would designate some 2.5 million acres of wilderness in California as well as create more than 400 miles of Wild and Scenic Rivers. The bill would also designate Salmon Restoration Areas and establish the Sacramento River National Conservation Area and Ancient Bristlecone Pine Forest.

The **Southern California Wild Heritage Wilderness Act** (H.R. 3325) and **Northern California Wild Heritage Wilderness Act** (H.R. 3327) have been introduced in the House by Rep. Hilda Solis (D-CA) and Rep. Mike Thompson (D-CA) respectively. Combined, these bills mirror the wilderness protection of the Boxer bill.

The **Northern California Coastal Wild Heritage Wilderness Act** (H.R. 1501/ S. 738), introduced by Rep. Thompson and Sen. Boxer would designate wilderness areas and segments of Wild and Scenic Rivers in California's Humboldt, Del Norte, Mendocino, Lake, and Napa Counties, which are encompassed in Thompson's congressional district. These areas are also included in S. 1555 and H.R. 3327).



The King Range features the longest stretch of undeveloped beach and coastal bluffs in the United States outside of Alaska. photo by C.S. Watson, Jr.

COLORADO

Rep. Diana DeGette's (D-CO) **Colorado Wilderness Act** (H.R. 2305) would permanently protect 1.3 million acres of wild lands in Colorado managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), as well as some 300,000 acres of adjacent Forest Service lands. The legislation would preserve more than 600,000 acres of deep canyons and pinion juniper forests, the towering Roan Plateau, Ponderosa Pine forests, and red rocks of the Snaggletooth area that are now at risk because of the recent policy change at the Interior Department.

IDAHO

Rep. Mike Simpson (R-ID) is working with stakeholders to introduce a recreation bill this year that will include a wilderness proposal for the Boulder White Cloud Area in the central part of the state.

NEVADA

Sens. Harry Reid (D-NV) and John Ensign (R-NV) are expected to propose wilderness protection as part of a public lands bill in Lincoln County.



NEW MEXICO

The **Ojito Wilderness Act** (S. 1649/H.R. 3176) was introduced by Sen. Jeff Bingaman (D-NM) and Rep. Tom Udall (D-NM), with Sen. Pete Domenici (R-NM) and Rep. Heather Wilson (R-NM) as original co-sponsors. This is a consensus proposal for 10,903 acres of wilderness.

UTAH

America's Redrock Wilderness Act (S. 639) was reintroduced in March by Sen. Richard Durbin (D-IL), and its companion House bill (H.R. 1796) was reintroduced in April by Rep. Maurice Hinchey (D-NY). This measure would protect 9.2 million acres of Utah's Canyon County, including the beautiful San Rafael Swell.

Rep. Rob Bishop has a measure (HR 2909) to protect portions of the Cedar Mountains area near Salt Lake City as wilderness. Hearings on the bill have been held and the Resources Committee is expected to vote on the bill in February 2004.

Assembly Hall Peak, Utah. Geologic wonders typify this unit, with mysterious slot canyons and countless other canyons. These lands are an important link to the Sids Mountain unit for the northern San Rafael desert bighorn sheep herd and are critical habitat for the endangered Peregrine Falcon. photo by David Muench

WASHINGTON

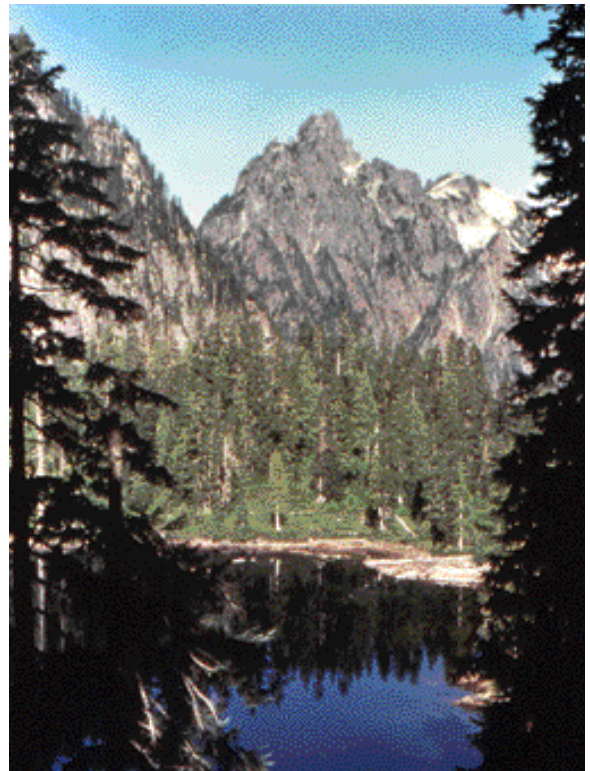
Sen. Patty Murray (D-WA) and Rep. Rick Larsen (D-WA) have reintroduced the **Wild Sky Wilderness Act** (S. 391/ H.R. 822) to permanently protect 106,000 acres of wild land on Washington state's Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest. S.391 has cleared the Senate.

ASSAULT ON WILDERNESS

Despite overwhelming public support for greater protection across demographic, religious, political affiliation and ethnic lines, the Bush administration has done more to roll back protection and prevent future consideration of wilderness than any president since the Wilderness Act was signed.

In just the last year:

- The Bush administration issued a “disclaimer of interest” rule allowing the federal government to give away public lands to states and counties for road building proposals across tens of millions of acres. This rule opened the door for any entity to stake claim to America's lands using an outdated mining law loophole known as RS 2477. (1-6-03)
- Administration announced plan to drill in the northwest planning section of Alaska's Western Arctic, also known as the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska. This wildlife-rich landscape is the nation's largest remaining block of unprotected public land. (1-17-03)
- Bush administration said “no more wilderness” in Alaska's Tongass National Forest, despite overwhelming public support for wilderness designation there. (2-28-03)
- Administration signed an agreement with the state of Utah supposedly establishing a process for recognizing highway rights-of-way using RS 2477. (4-9-03)
- Administration “settled” a lawsuit with the state of Utah, jeopardizing the future of tens of millions of acres of wilderness. The deal reverses decades-long wilderness policy and prevents federal land managers from ever again inventorying and recommending land for permanent protection as wilderness. (4-11-03)
- Secretary Norton issued a memo stating there will be no more wilderness in Alaska unless the state's notoriously anti-wilderness governor, senators and representative all agree. (4-11-03)
- Administration announced it will gut popular National Forest Roadless Rule. Sixty million acres of potential wilderness are threatened. (6-9-03)
- Bush administration asked the U.S. Supreme Court to overturn a lower court ruling that found the American people have a right to force federal agencies to comply with the law and protect Wilderness Study Areas from damage. (The Supreme Court announced in November it will take the case.) (7-18-03)
- Bush administration formalized April 11 settlement, establishing a “no more wilderness” national policy. (9-29-03)
- Administration opened all nine million acres of the Northwest Planning Area of the wildlife-rich Western Arctic to oil and gas drilling. (10-20-03)
- Bush administration held first oil and gas lease sale for wilderness-quality lands in Utah that were formerly off-limits to development. Just a few years ago, the Bureau of Land Management said these lands were worthy of wilderness designation. (11-24-03)



Gunn Peak in the proposed Wild Sky Wilderness
photo by Mark Lawler

For more information about the state of the wild, please visit www.leaveitwild.org and www.wildernessforever.org

“The preservation of wilderness areas across the country today enables us to recapture a vital part of the national experience: like our forebears we can journey into primeval, unspoiled land. ...Wilderness preservation insures that a central facet of our Nation can still be realized, not just remembered.”

Gerald R. Ford, December 4, 1974



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