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Preservation Proposed for San Gabriel Mountains, Eastern Sierra

Bipartisan bill would create Wild & Scenic Rivers and add 476,000 Wilderness acres

Wild rivers in the San Gabriel Mountains and Eastern Sierra took a huge step toward preservation yesterday. The bipartisan Eastern Sierra and Northern San Gabriel Wild Heritage Act was introduced as companion House and Senate bills sponsored by Rep. Buck McKeon (R-CA) and Senator Barbara Boxer (D-CA).

The legislation proposes to protect more than 52 miles of Wild & Scenic Rivers and nearly 476,000 acres of Wilderness, including some of the most spectacular scenery in the West.

The **Amargosa River south of Death Valley**, the **Owens River Headwaters in the Eastern Sierra**, and **Piru Creek north of Los Angeles** would gain Wild & Scenic protection. The Owens River Headwaters flows into one of the most popular wild trout streams in the West. Piru Creek is one of only three year-round coldwater trout streams in Southern California. The Amargosa is a rare free-flowing desert river that supports many rare and endangered wildlife species.

According to Steve Evans, Conservation Director of the statewide organization Friends of the River, the legislation would significantly diversify rivers protected in the federal systems. "This legislation protects three distinct streams in the Eastern Sierra, Mojave Desert, and San Gabriel Mountains. Those are such important ecological regions that were -- up to now -- unrepresented in the system," he said.

Approximately 19 miles of Glass Creek, Deadman Creek and Big Springs would be protected as a Wild and Scenic River in the Eastern Sierra. These water sources come together to form the Owens River – a favored destination of wild trout anglers from across the nation.

A 26-mile segment of the Amargosa River near the Mojave Desert communities of Shoshone and Tecopa would be protected, not only for its important habitat, but also as a unique desert recreation area for tourists.

A 7-mile segment of Piru Creek with easy access off of Interstate 5 would also be protected north of Los Angeles. The segment is a popular destination not only for anglers but also families who visit the creek to escape the summer heat.

All the stream segments flow through public lands managed by the Forest Service or the Bureau of Land Management. Wild & Scenic protects streams from new dams and requires that the public lands along their banks be managed to protect outstanding natural and cultural values. Wild & Scenic designation does not affect private land use or property rights. Friends of the River had originally nominated all three rivers as potential additions to the Wild & Scenic Rivers System. The respective agencies then determined the rivers to be eligible for protection.

The legislation also proposes protection for more than 476,000 acres of Wilderness on the eastside of the Sierra Nevada, in the White Mountains on the Nevada border, and along the northern slope of the San Gabriel Mountains near Los Angeles. The existing Hoover, Emigrant, Ansel Adams, and John Muir Wilderness areas would all gain significant additions, while entirely new areas would be protected in the White Mountains, on Granite Mountain, and in the San Gabriel Mountains. The areas include some of the most spectacular scenery in the west and are popular destinations for hikers, backpackers, anglers, hunters, equestrians, and all those seeking unconfined and primitive forms recreation.

The legislation comes during the 40th Anniversary of the National Wild & Scenic Rivers Act, which was passed by Congress in 1968. California has approximately 1,900 miles of Wild & Scenic Rivers, the most recent addition of which was the Black Butte River in northwestern California in 2006. Friends of the River played a key role in the protection of virtually every Wild & Scenic River in the state since the organization was founded in 1973.

Eastern Sierra and Northern San Gabriel Wild Heritage Act (HR6156/S3069)
Introduced by Rep. Buck McKeon (R-CA) and Senator Barbara Boxer (D-CA)
May 23, 2008

Amargosa Wild & Scenic River – 26.3 miles

Location: Inyo and San Bernardino Counties, Bureau of Land Management

The Amargosa River is a stunning oasis in the surrounding desert landscape of the northern Mojave Desert. The only river flowing into Death Valley, it sustains biologically rich wetlands and riparian forests as it makes its way through ancient, rugged canyons. The Amargosa supports more than 280 bird species, including several that are threatened and endangered.

Owens Headwaters Wild & Scenic Rivers – 19.1 miles

Location: Mono County, Inyo National Forest

The Owens River headwaters, including Glass Creek, Deadman Creek, and Big Springs, support one of America's finest and most popular trout fisheries. Found eligible for

inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic River system by the Inyo National Forest, Wild & Scenic protection of the public lands along the Upper Owens River would tremendously enhance the Eastern Sierra fishing economy.

Piru Creek Wild & Scenic River – 7.25 miles

Location: Los Angeles County, Angeles and Los Padres National Forests

Located northwest of Castaic, Piru Creek is one of the few year-round catch and release trout fishing streams in southern California. With easy access from Interstate 5, the creek is a popular recreational destination for family picnics and summertime wading. High winter and spring flows offer one of the most spectacular class IV wilderness kayak runs in the west. Piru Creek provides habitat for numerous threatened and endangered wildlife species, including arroyo toad, California red-legged frog, least Bell's vireo, southwestern willow fly-catcher, California condor and southern steelhead.

White Mountains Wilderness – 223,517 acres

Location: Mono County, Inyo National Forest

The White Mountains are America's largest and highest desert mountain range. They contain the largest expanse of alpine tundra in western North America, the highest peak in the Great Basin, and the second largest unprotected roadless area in the lower 48 states. The Whites are home to the world's oldest living trees, the ancient bristlecone pines, which live to almost 5,000 years. With its large size and tremendous diversity of unique and beautiful habitats, the Whites are world-renowned for scientific research and are home to desert bighorn sheep, pronghorn antelope and other mountain and desert wildlife and plants.

Hoover & Emigrant Wilderness Additions – 76,982 acres

Location: Mono County, Humboldt-Toiyabe and Inyo National Forests

The Hoover Wilderness Additions represent a classic High Sierra landscape of deeply carved glacial valleys dotted with tranquil alpine lakes and forests of lodgepole pine. The northern Hoover Additions ("west" and "east"), which includes 12 miles of the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail and the headwaters of the West Walker River, is a popular recreation destination for hikers, anglers, hunters and equestrians. The southern portion, consisting mostly of a high plateau rising above the west shore of Mono Lake, is home to a reintroduced population of the endangered Sierra Nevada bighorn sheep.

Granite Mountain Wilderness – 35,564 acres

Location: Mono County, Bureau of Land Management – Bishop Field Office

East of Mono Lake, Granite Mountain is a geologically varied landscape of open alluvial basins, basaltic plateaus and granite ridges. Its Great Basin sagebrush steppe habitat is currently underrepresented in the National Wilderness Preservation System. The area contains sage grouse, deer migration corridors, abundant raptor nesting sites and wild horses.

Owens River Headwaters Wilderness – 15,247 acres

Location: Mono County, Inyo National Forest

Over 100 seeps and springs form the headwaters of the Owens River just east of the San Joaquin ridge between Mammoth and June Lakes. This area is the Eastern Sierra's most important river system and a popular wild trout fishery. The area contains exceptionally diverse and unique habitats including the largest subalpine meadow in the central Eastern Sierra (Glass Creek Meadow), the region's largest old growth red fir forest, and habitat for many sensitive and rare plant and animal species.

John Muir Wilderness Additions – 80,112 acres

Location: Mono and Inyo Counties, Inyo National Forest

These additions would move the current wilderness boundary down from the crest to include more of the steep Eastern Sierra scarp. The boundary adjustments would protect the unparalleled viewshed, transitional lower elevation habitat and trout-bearing streams which flow down into the Owens Valley while maintaining access to popular car camping, hunting and fishing sites.

Pleasant View Ridge Wilderness – 28,424 acres

Location: Los Angeles County, Angeles National Forest

This spectacular area is located south of the desert communities of Palmdale/Lancaster on the north slope of the San Gabriel Mountains. The area features 8,200-foot Mt.

Williamson and other dramatic peaks, the headwaters of Little Rock Creek, and some of the most magnificent and remote ridge and canyon country in southern California. The Pacific Crest Trail and other popular trails access the area, which offers opportunities for fishing, rock climbing, class IV kayaking, and snowshoeing. It is home to bighorn sheep and the mountain yellow-legged frog, old-growth pines, and Joshua trees.

Magic Mountain Wilderness – 13,709 acres

Location: Los Angeles County, Angeles National Forest

A scenic backdrop to the Santa Clarita Valley, Magic Mountain's chaparral covered hillsides and live oak canyons drain into the Santa Clara River. Visitors enjoy the spectacular view from the summit of Magic Mountain, and hikers and equestrians can journey from the mountain's summit down to the river. An important habitat link with mountain ranges to the north and west, Magic Mountain is frequently visited by California condors and also provides habitat for black bear, mountain lion, bobcat and deer.