Comments on DEIS Volume 2, Appendix C:
Wild and Scenic Rivers Evaluation
for the Inyo, Sequoia, and Sierra National Forests

General Comments on Evaluation Process

The Forest Service deserves recognition for conducting a comprehensive evaluation of potential Wild & Scenic Rivers (WSRs) in the Forest Plans Revision (FPR) process. We appreciate that the agency incorporated its previously completed inventories, eligibility findings, and suitability recommendations. We also greatly appreciate that the Inyo and Sierra Forests determined additional streams to be eligible.

However, we identified a number of problems with Appendix C that require attention – not the least of which is the Sequoia Forest’s dismal (in comparison to the Inyo and Sierra) inventory and evaluation results, which failed to identify any new eligible stream segments.

We also appreciated the opportunity to review and comment on the preliminary inventory and evaluation in February 2016. However, we are disappointed to find that few of the points raised in our 26 pages of detailed comments were addressed in Appendix C. So these comments are somewhat duplicative to the ones submitted by CalWild et al dated Feb. 1, 2016, which are hereby incorporate by reference. Be advised that new additional points are included in these comments.

WSR Inventory/Evaluation Comments Applicable To All Three Forests


The inventory process appears to be restricted to rivers and streams named on 7.5-minute USGS quad maps. There is nothing in the Forest Service Handbook (FSH), federal guidelines, or in federal law that limits WSR inventories and evaluations to only named streams. Unnamed tributaries can significantly contribute to the free flowing condition and outstanding values of an eligible named stream. Unnamed tributaries of the upper Truckee River were ultimately found eligible because they provide habitat for and contribute to the recommended river’s outstandingly remarkable Lahontan cutthroat trout fishery value.

For determining eligible river segments, segment termini, and boundaries, the FSH advises to “Consider the entire river system, including the interrelationship between the main stem and its tributaries and their associated ecosystems which may contain outstandingly remarkable values.” (FSH 1909.12_82.61.2, pg. 8) The FSH guidelines indicate that the inventory should include named rivers on USGS 7.5 quad maps, but it does not limit the inventory only to those named streams.

Public Input on the Inventory (pgs. 379-380) –

The public sources cited provide useful information about streams that should be studied. However, there are other sources that also should be consulted, including the Forest Service’s list of Critical Aquatic Refuges, Potential Aquatic Diversity Management Areas in the Sierra Nevada (SNEP Report Vol. III, Chapter 9), and American Whitewater’s National Whitewater Inventory.1 It should be noted

1 http://www.americanwhitewater.org/content/River/state-summary/state/CA/

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that comprehensive inventories conducted by knowledgeable local Forest Service resource staff nearly always identify eligible streams in addition to those identified by the public.

**Inventory Maps (pgs. 381-384) –**

Public review and understanding would be vastly improved if the forest-wide inventory maps in Appendix C included the names of the inventoried segments, as well as the background hydrological system (to better facilitate understanding of the connections to non-eligible streams). The maps should also depict existing and recommended WSRs, so that the public would be able to recognize that some of the newly-identified eligible streams are tributaries and contribute to the flow and outstandingly remarkable values of designated and recommended WSRs. Appendix C should include more detailed maps of each eligible segment showing the proposed river corridors, segments, and classifications. Considering the 15 year or more lifespan of the FPRs, it is essential that segment details be fully documented in the FPRs so that the agency can fully meet its responsibility to protect their free flowing condition and outstandingly remarkable values.

**Region of Comparison (pgs. 385-386) –**

Establishing the region of comparison helps determine whether a specific value is outstandingly remarkable. Consistent use of the region of comparison is critical to an adequate assessment. But care should be taken to avoid intentionally or unintentionally using the region of comparison to artificially winnow down the list of potentially eligible rivers and streams. The FSH provides broad discretion for determining the regions of comparison for each value. Consequently, each Forest used significantly different regions of comparison to identify outstanding values in for streams assessed in Appendix C. This may have contributed to the widely varying results (many eligible streams identified on the Sierra, a few new eligible streams identified on the Inyo, and no additional streams other than the four identified in the 1991-95 inventory process on the Sequoia).

The inventory should use precise terms when identifying the region of comparison. For example, the Sierra and Sequoia Forest evaluations in Appendix C used the “Sierra Nevada Bioregion” and “Sierra Nevada Province” (respectively) to assess scenery, recreation, and geology values. We assume the Sierra Nevada Bioregion used to assess these values (and two others) on the Sierra Forest is the same bioregion depicted on a map in the Forest Service’s Final Bioregional Assessment. The reviewing public may be tempted to assume that “Sierra Nevada Bioregion” and “Sierra Nevada Province” are the same, but they are not. The Forest Service’s Final Bioregional Assessment has a map of the bioregion that includes the Modoc and Lassen Forests, small portions of the Klamath and Shasta-Trinity Forests, as well as portions of the White, Inyo, and Tehachapi Mountains. The Sierra Nevada geomorphic province does not include the Modoc, Lassen, Klamath, and Shasta-Trinity Forests or the White and Inyo Mountains. In addition, Sierra Nevada Bioregion maps available on the Internet are widely varying, so Appendix C should clearly indicate it is using the Bioregion depicted in the Bioregional Assessment.

**Previous Inventories (pg. 386-387) –**

Both the Inyo and Sequoia Forests had previously completed at least partial WSR evaluations in the 1990s. The background information from these previous efforts is not generally available to the public and should be made available as supporting documents on the Forest Plans website. Although Appendix
C references these previous evaluations, it does not provide the level of detail needed for a reviewer to determine why certain decisions were made concerning eligibility or ineligibility. Further, neither of these previous evaluations were subject to full formal public review. The Inyo Forest solicited public feedback in 1993 on its previous evaluations, but the project was then shelved and background information as to why streams were not determined eligible was not made available to the public. The 1991-95 Sequoia Forest evaluation was never formally made available for public comment. Since many of the ineligibility decisions from these previous evaluations have been incorporated into Appendix C, it is important that all the information that led to ineligibility decisions be available for public review and comment.

**Inyo Forest Evaluation Results**

Although we greatly appreciate that Appendix C includes streams previously inventoried as well as new ones, delineating this distinction in separate sections makes this document unnecessarily difficult for public review. We recommend that the Appendix C evaluation be re-organized into three primary sections: (1) All streams assessed, (2) those found to be free-flowing, and (3) those found to be free flowing and to possess one or more outstandingly remarkable values. Footnotes or italics can be used to distinguish between previously and newly inventoried streams. But what is truly important to the public is whether all streams were considered and which ones were included or excluded in this evaluation using FHS criteria.

**Free Flowing Streams List (pgs. 391-392)**

Some streams nominated by the public in scoping comments are not included on the list of free-flowing streams, including Black Canyon, George Creek, and Independence Creek. But Appendix C provides no information as to why the Forest Service apparently determined them to be not free flowing. It should be noted that the BLM found segments of George and Independence Creeks downstream of the National Forest boundary to be free flowing and to possess outstandingly remarkable values. We know of no existing diversions that would cause the agency to find them to be not free flowing.

**Screening for Outstanding Prehistory/History/Cultural Values (pg. 393)**

The paragraph defining criteria to determine outstanding Prehistory and History values fails to consider current cultural values and uses of local Native American Tribes. In comparison, the inventories on the Sequoia and Sierra Forests considered current cultural uses, as do many other WSR assessments conducted on other Forests. Many sites along rivers are sacred and important to current Native American cultural uses. These ongoing uses should be considered in determining historical/cultural values.

**History/Prehistory Region of Comparison (pg. 394)**

The reasoning that no outstanding history/prehistory values can be identified because a majority of cultural sites on the Inyo Forest have not been formally researched and evaluated is faulty logic (see additional discussion of this issue under “New Inventory Streams Determined Ineligible”). Lack of cultural research and surveys is chronic on virtually all National Forests, and yet other Forests manage to identify outstanding cultural/historical values. The Inyo Forest is unique in that it was a major trading crossroads between indigenous people from the Great Basin, Mojave Desert and from the western...
Sierra. As such, we recommend that the Forest itself be the region of comparison for historical/cultural values.

**New Inventory Streams Determined Eligible (pgs. 395-397)**

We appreciate the new inventory and eligibility finding for Fish Creek. The FSH directs the agency to “Consider the entire river system, including the interrelationship between the main stem and its tributaries and their associated ecosystems which may contain outstandingly remarkable values.” (FSH 1909.12_82.61.2) Fish Creek is located on both the Inyo and Sierra Forests. Accordingly, the narrative should be revised to note that Fish Creek is a major tributary to the Middle Fork San Joaquin River (a recommended WSR in the 1992 Sierra Forest Plan Record of Decision) and that the draft Sierra Forest Plan identifies four of Fish Creek’s tributaries as eligible (Silver, Sharktooth, Long Canyon, Minnow Creeks).

**New Inventory Streams Determined Ineligible (pgs. 397-398)**

The generic examples provided as to why some streams were found ineligible due to a supposed lack of outstanding values does not provide sufficient information for meaningful public comment. Some of the narrative about outstanding fish, wildlife, prehistory, and history values is not based on the Act, federal guidelines, or the FSH. For example:

**Outstanding Fish & Wildlife Values** –There appears to be an attempt to limit findings only to those species found primarily in streams and rivers and not in springs, wetlands, wet meadows, and even lakes. The National Wild & Scenic Rivers Act defines “river” as a “flowing body of water or estuary or a section, portion, or tributary thereof, including rivers, streams, creeks, runs, kills, rills, and small lakes.” Please note that the list of waterways after the word “including” is not exclusive. Springs, small lakes, and even wetlands and wet meadows may indeed be considered “rivers” eligible for protection. Given the broad definition of water bodies eligible for WSR consideration, this narrative uses faulty logic to explain ineligibility findings for streams that provide important, in some case crucial, habitat for sensitive, threatened and endangered fish and amphibian species.

**Amphibian & Toad Populations** – Use of this faulty logic appears to be particularly tortured in regard to fast-disappearing amphibian and toad populations. If “stream dwelling populations of frogs have all but disappeared” on the Inyo Forest (pg. 398), then any remaining stream dwelling populations are by definition outstandingly remarkable under FSH 1909.12_82.73a criteria. Nor should populations largely dependent on wetlands or small lakes be discounted as ineligible simply because these waterbodies are not streams or rivers.

Further, the statement that “Yosemite toads are dependent on meadow and upland systems” (pg. 398) implies that this species is not dependent on adjacent flowing water systems, even though the very next sentence admits that “Small pools of low flowing water provide breeding areas…” According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Yosemite toads spend the majority of their life in the upland habitats proximate to their breeding meadows, but usually not more than a hundred meters from permanent water (https://www.fws.gov/sacramento/es_species/Accounts/Amphibians-Reptiles/es_yosemite-toad.htm). This clearly meets the FSH requirement that an outstandingly remarkable value be “river-
related” (FSH 1909.12_87.73). Just because a toad population doesn’t live its entire life in flowing water doesn’t discount it for consideration as possible outstanding wildlife value.

**Prehistory & History Values** – National Register evaluation is not a requirement in the FSH. The fact that a majority of documented cultural resources have not been investigated, researched, or evaluated against National Register criteria on the Inyo Forest does not warrant the apparent lack of findings for outstanding prehistoric, historic, or cultural values for any Inyo Forest stream considered in Appendix C.

FSH 1909.12_82.3 requires the use of *professional judgment, best available scientific information, and public participation* to identify values. The 1993 Inyo inventory identified at least five streams with outstanding historical/cultural values even with the acknowledged lack of forest-wide of historical/cultural information. Other Forests have identified eligible streams with outstanding historical/cultural values even though incomplete cultural resource inventories are a chronic problem shared by virtually all National Forests.

Inyo streams with known and documented prehistory and history values should be recognized for these values. As more information becomes available, this information can be reconsidered in a future FPR. Further, the fact that the Inyo didn’t apparently consider or identify any current cultural values in the WSR evaluation is troubling. Recreation Place descriptions mention current cultural uses in the Bishop-Convict Creek and Glass Mountain Places (Inyo Draft Plan pgs. 69-70). It seems likely that some of this use may be associated with streams and could constitute an outstandingly remarkable cultural value. Cultural records should be reviewed and local Tribes consulted to identify any current river-related cultural and traditional use sites to evaluate potential outstandingly remarkable cultural values.

At the minimum, the list of new inventory streams found ineligible (pg. 397) should be reassessed for eligibility using the actual criteria in the FSH.

**Specific Comments On Ineligible Streams**

**Birch Creek** – Birch Creek was determined to be free flowing but apparently the Forest Service did not identify any outstanding values. Birch Creek supports a lush riparian corridor in the transition zone between the Mojave and Great Basin deserts. The creek’s small but rich birch-cottonwood riparian forest supports a recently discovered isolated population of black toad, a California Fully Protected Species (also state-listed as threatened). The toad has the smallest range of any North American amphibian, especially considering that its requisite permanent aquatic habitat – marshes, springs, and slow-moving streams – is surrounded by desert. The presence of black toad is unique within the region of comparison. Black toads are highly aquatic, only leaving its watery habitat to migrate to other permanent water sources. The toads occupying this canyon are completely dependent on Birch Creek and are isolated from lower elevation populations at Deep Springs Lake and Cuna Springs.

Birch Creek also contains unique geology as recognized in the Deep Spring North Potential Wilderness Narrative: “A central feature in the area is the Birch Creek granite batholith, which is emplaced amidst the parent sedimentary rocks of the White Mountains. The Birch Creek drainage comprises the majority of the area. Portions of the creek have perennial flows, and the creek is noted for its travertine formations and the canyon it has formed through the granite batholith.”
We believe that Birch Creek possesses outstandingly remarkable scenic, geological, wildlife, and ecological values and it should be identified as eligible in Appendix C.

**Dexter and Wet Canyons** – Dexter and Wet Canyons were nominated by the public and Appendix C lists them on pages 391-392 as free flowing (although Wet Canyon may be mistakenly identified as “Wet Creek”). Dexter Canyon is subsequently listed on page 392 as not possessing any outstandingly remarkable values. There is no mention of Wet Canyon on this page. Again, because little information is provided on why streams failed various screenings, it is difficult to determine why Dexter and Wet Canyons fail the outstanding values test in both the 1993 Inventory and the current Inventory.

Public scoping comments identified outstanding scenic, ecological, wildlife, and other values for Dexter and Wet Canyons. The fact that these streams are located in a distinct transition zone between the Sierra Nevada bioregion and the Great Basin/Desert bioregion underscores the unique ecological values of these streams.

The relative wetness of Dexter and Wet Canyons in a distinctively dry area is due in part to the Pacific moisture plume that makes its way east over Deadman Pass in the Sierra crest to a unique in the eastern Sierra transverse range formed by Bald and Glass Mountains and their associated highlands. Dexter and Wet Canyons are the primary drainages in the most geographically varied and ecologically rich region of the northern Inyo National Forest. Flowing from broad headwater meadows, the streams have carved deeply incised steep-walled canyons reminiscent of the desert southwest, flowing through a landscape of rough-hewn granite knobs, rolling uplands, and volcanic mesas.

Major meadow complexes (Crooked Meadows, Sentinel Meadows, and Wet Meadow) are the sources of Dexter and Wet Canyons and their tributaries. Locally limited but ecologically critical riparian habitat, including aspen groves, willow thickets, bunch grasses, and sedges are thick along the banks of both creeks. The uplands are dominated by old-growth lodgepole and Jeffrey pine forests, open sagebrush plains, and extensive snowbank aspen groves (distinct from riparian aspens). The incredibly diverse habitat provided by these streams supports goshawk, greater sage grouse, black-backed woodpeckers, willow flycatchers, nesting golden eagles, badgers, abundant mule deer, and brook trout.

According to a report from Trout Unlimited, Dexter and Wet Canyons are a subset of drainages flowing northeast from the Bald-Glass transverse range that possess some of the highest aquatic integrity scores in the eastern Sierra region. Because they contribute significantly to the overall values of Dexter Canyon, we propose that the unnamed tributary that rises from Sentinel Meadow and Wild Cow Canyon be included in the eligibility assessment for Dexter Canyon.

At the minimum, it appears that Dexter and Wet Canyons possess outstandingly remarkable scenic and ecological values. No specifics are provided as to why the scenic values and features of these streams were not considered notable or exemplary. In fact, the scenic values of these streams appear to be radically different that many other streams on the Inyo Forest. The generic explanation given as to why these streams do not apparently possess outstanding ecological values is also lacking specifics. Both streams and their surrounding canyons possess many of the potential natural vegetation types that could be outstanding, including pinyon-juniper, sagebrush shrub, Jeffrey pine, and special vegetation types such as aspen, cottonwood, and dry forb. In fact, it’s the combination of these vegetation types that make these streams unique.
George Creek – George Creek was not determined eligible in the previous inventory (pg. 398) and apparently this finding was not re-evaluated in Appendix C, even though public scoping comments requested re-evaluation. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) found 3.75 miles of George Creek to be eligible downstream from the National Forest boundary. The creek was found to possess outstandingly remarkable fish and wildlife, and ecological values. Forest Service and BLM WSR evaluation criteria are very similar. It seems unlikely that the upstream National Forest segment of the creek is not free flowing and does not possess outstandingly remarkable values if the downstream BLM possess these attributes. We recommend that George Creek be re-evaluated and found eligible.

Independence Creek – Independence Creek was not determined eligible in the previous inventory (pg. 398) and apparently this finding was not re-evaluated in Appendix C, even though public scoping comments requested re-evaluation. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) found 2.5 miles of Independence Creek to be eligible downstream from the National Forest boundary. The creek was found to possess outstandingly remarkable recreational, fish and wildlife, and ecological values. Forest Service and BLM WSR evaluation criteria are very similar. It seems unlikely that the upstream National Forest segment of the creek is not free flowing and does not possess outstandingly remarkable values if the downstream BLM possess these attributes. We recommend that Independence Creek be re-evaluated and found eligible.

Little Hot Creek – According to Appendix C (pg. 398), the endangered Owens tui chub “now can only exist in and above (italics ours) impounded reservoirs,” where the dams creating the reservoirs provide a barrier against non-native predatory fish and hybridization with other species. A dam-created reservoir is not generally considered eligible, but the Little Hot Creek habitat upstream of the existing impoundment is eligible. The importance of this upstream habitat is underscored by the fact that the Forest Service and its partners have spent considerable effort to close and restore roads in the Little Hot Creek watershed to protect water quality and chub habitat.

The fact that a downstream barrier is needed to ensure the survival of this species in the stream segment upstream should not exclude the stream from consideration. The Inyo Forest need look no further than Cottonwood Creek in the White Mountains – found eligible by the Forest Service in 1993 and designated by Congress in 2009. Cottonwood Creek’s outstandingly remarkable fishery value is its Paiute cutthroat trout habitat and population, which is protected from downstream predators by a man-made barrier in the designated segment.

Based on the Act’s broad definition of rivers as any “flowing body of water” and in consideration of the real world example of a barrier protecting Cottonwood Creek’s outstanding fish value, there is simply no valid reason to exclude Little Hot Creek upstream of the impoundment from eligibility if the Owens tui chub is or could be found “above” the impoundment and particularly since the creek is the source water that supplies habitat for one of only four populations of this species in existence.

Appendix C already recognizes that the Owens tui chub as an outstanding fish value due to its rarity and federal endangered status, so it appears the only reason why Little Hot Creek was found ineligible is the presence of the existing reservoir. If the Owens tui chub is indeed dependent on the Little Hot Springs Creek source water upstream of the impoundment, there is no reason why the short segment of Little

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Hot Creek upstream of the existing impoundment should not found eligible due to its outstandingly remarkable fishery value.

**Mammoth Creek** – Mammoth Creek is listed as free flowing (pg. 392). But apparently, the creek was found to have no outstanding values. Historic mining sites along Mammoth Creek (Hayden Cabin, Consolidated Mine) have been interpreted for the public and attract recreational visitors. Current management direction is to “Maintain and enhance cultural resource interpretive sites” for these historic sites (1988 Inyo Forest Plan pg. 193). If these sites are of sufficient importance and interest to invest resources for public interpretation, then it seems likely they may possess combined outstanding historic and recreational values.

**Mill Creek** – It is unclear whether Mill Creek downstream of Lundy Lake considered free-flowing or as possessing outstanding values. Mill Creek is the third largest tributary to Mono Lake. The segment downstream of Lundy Lake provides outstanding scenic vistas of both the lake and the high Sierra, offers a wide variety of stream-based recreation, and sustains riparian and wetland habitat that supports a high species composition of songbirds and nesting habitat for waterfowl. The lower segment should be found eligible with outstanding scenic, recreation, and wildlife values.

**Nine Mile Creek** – Nine Mile Creek is listed as free flowing (pg. 392). The route of the historic Jordan Toll Road follows almost all of Nine Mile Creek. Historic cabins and sites at Jordan Hot Springs and Casa Vieja Meadows are also adjacent to the creek. This constitutes an outstandingly remarkable history value.

**O’Harrel Canyon Creek** – O’Harrel Canyon Creek is free flowing but is listed as not possessing any outstanding values. Threatened Lahontan cutthroat trout were transplanted to the O’Harrel Creek. This should not automatically discount the clear outstandingly remarkable fish value. Lahontan cutthroat trout populations transplanted to creeks (some outside of the natural range of the species) have been previously found to possess outstandingly remarkable fish value (the Stanislaus Forest most notably). Eligibility would not hinder any on-going restoration efforts in the creek. In addition, the creek flows out of a rugged and scenic canyon on the south side of the Glass Mountains. We believe the creek possesses outstandingly remarkable fish and scenic values.

**Olancha Creek** – Olancha Creek is listed as free flowing (pg. 392). The route of the historic Jordan Toll Road follows Olancha Creek. This may constitute an outstandingly remarkable history value.

**Parker Creek** – A 4.5-mile segment of Parker Creek from its headwaters to the Ansel Adams Wilderness boundary is identified as eligible due to its outstanding scenery and recreation values (pgs. 425-426). Approximately 2 miles of Parker Creek from the Wilderness boundary to the Inyo National Forest boundary was inexplicably not determined eligible. This lower segment supports a rich riparian corridor and adjacent meadow ecosystem supporting aspens, cottonwoods, wetlands and grassland meadows, and sagebrush scrub vegetation types. Aspens along this stream segment display Basque carvings dating back at least 80 years.

Although the entire stream segment is within the National Forest reservation, only about half of it is actually managed by the Forest Service. The remaining half is owned by LADWP, which may be interested in relinquishing the property since it has lost its right to divert water from Parker Creek.
Including the lower 2-mile segment down to the Forest boundary in the eligible segment would expand the diversity of the ecosystems protected in the stream corridor and add important target vegetation types.

All of Parker Creek within the federal reservation should be determined eligible for ecological and history values.

**Rush Creek** – Appendix C is confusing in regard to the eligibility of Rush Creek. A 3.7-mile segment of Rush Creek from its headwaters to Waugh Lake is listed as eligible in Table C-22 on pg. 571 and it appears eligible on the “North” Inyo map (Figure C-77, pg. 573). However, Rush Creek is included on a list of nine streams identified in the previous inventory that were determined ineligible (pg. 398). Nor is there a detailed narrative for Rush Creek in either of the sections in Appendix C that provide results for Inyo Forest New Inventory and Previous Inventory streams (pgs. 395-397 and 399-438 respectively). The Draft WSR Evaluation released for public feedback in December 2015 does provide a detailed eligibility narrative for the upper segment of Rush Creek in the New Inventory eligibility results section (pg. 20).

We recommend that Appendix C be corrected to show most of Rush Creek within the federal reservation boundaries to be eligible (headwaters to Grant Lake, Forest boundary to Mono Lake). Rush Creek is the largest tributary of Mono Lake – an outstanding natural feature of the Inyo National Forest that attracts thousands visitors from all over the world. Congress recognized the lake’s significance and the lower segment of Rush Creek and the other streams that feed into it by establishing the Mono Basin Scenic Area in 1984. The Scenic Area was established to protect the Basin’s geological, ecological, cultural, scenic, and other natural resources.

Mono Lake was in danger of drying up due to major diversions from its tributary streams until a series of historic court decisions and a landmark state water rights ruling required the restoration of fresh water flows in Rush Creek and other major tributaries to restore the health of the lake. Because of their statewide significance, these rulings represent an outstandingly remarkable historical value and the restored flow from Rush Creek into Mono Lake represents an outstandingly remarkable hydrological/ecological value.

We believe the segments of Rush Creek downstream of Waugh Lake also support outstanding geological, wildlife, cultural, and recreation values. There is nothing in the narrative in Draft WSR Inventory to support the contention that somehow all the outstanding scenic and recreation values of Rush Creek are confined to the stream upstream of Waugh Lake. As practical matter, the primary access for visitors to enjoy these values is to hike upstream from Silver Lake or by hiking the Pacific Crest Trail. It seems unlikely that people would hike five miles upstream from Silver Lake or many more miles on the PCT solely to enjoy the scenery and recreation values of the 3.7-mile stream segment above Waugh Lake.

Rush Creek downstream of the National Forest boundary and the Mono Basin Scenic Area boundary also possesses outstanding values. The creek cuts through an Ice Age lakebed as it flows into the Mono Lake, creating bottomlands habitat and a creek delta rare in the Great Basin. Riparian habitat along Rush Creek supports the highest concentrations of yellow warblers in California and is now attracting endangered willow flycatchers. Native Americans formerly used this section of Rush Creek as a summer
home and for ceremonial purposes. The lower creek also attracts visitors seeking all types of recreational pursuits, including fishing, photography, and birding (particularly in the delta).

Although LADWP owns inholdings along Rush Creek, the Forest Service has full authority to assess streams within the boundaries of its federal reservation (which includes both the Inyo Forest and the Mono Basin Scenic Area). We believe the entire creek within federal reservation boundaries (including segments within inholdings) should be eligible, due to its outstanding historical, recreational, wildlife, hydrological/ecological values, and cultural values. At the minimum, Appendix C needs to be revised to correctly display the eligibility finding for the upper 3.7-mile segment.

Specific Comments About Eligible Streams On The Inyo Forest –

**Cottonwood Creek** (pgs. 401-405) – The segment descriptions are confusing and do not correspond to the segment classifications depicted on the map (Fig. C-79, pg. 576). The narrative classifies Cottonwood Creek segments 1-4 as wild, recreational, wild, and recreational (respectively). The Fig. C-79 shows five segments, two of which are classified as scenic. This discrepancy should be fixed.

**Golden Trout Creek** (pgs. 406-408) – Volcano Creek, a major tributary of Golden Trout Creek, is part of the Golden Trout/Volcano Critical Aquatic Refuge (CAR). Golden Trout are numerous in both streams. FSH 1909.12_82.61.2 directs the Forest Service to consider the “entire river system.” Volcano Creek clearly complements and is part of the outstanding fishery values of the Golden Trout Creek system and should be found eligible as a tributary to Golden Trout Creek.

**Hot Creek** (pgs. 407-408) – According to American Whitewater, Hot Creek provides an outstanding class II whitewater opportunity during the peak spring run-off. Boaters paddle through a unique canyon with stunning geology, hot springs, and plentiful wildlife. Whitewater boating should be included as part of the creek’s outstanding recreation value.

The narrative should also note that the BLM found a one-mile segment of this creek directly downstream of the Forest boundary to be eligible in recognition of its outstandingly remarkable geological, fish, wildlife, and hydrological values. The narrative should be revised to include the outstanding wildlife (exceptionally high value riparian habitat), as well as outstanding hydrological value (greatest average annual discharge of all Lahontan streams) identified by the BLM.

**Lee Vining Creek** (pgs. 409-414) – Segment 2 has two different segment descriptions. The first on pg. 410 describes the segment from headwaters to Greenstone Lake. On pg. 411, the summary of eligibility findings describes segment 2 as Saddlebag Lake to Highway 120, which is actually the segment 3 description on pg. 412. This discrepancy should be fixed.

The lower segment of Lee Vining Creek downstream of the LADWP diversion pond was not found eligible. In addition, the overall importance of this second-largest tributary to Mono Lake, in maintaining the lake’s health, is ignored. Like Rush Creek, diversions from Lee Vining Creek were contributing to the decline of Mono Lake and were limited by a series of landmark court and regulatory rulings with historic statewide implications. Lee Vining Creek clearly possesses outstandingly remarkable history values. The oldest known campsite in the Mono Basin is on the creek near the Lee
Vining Ranger Station. In addition, the Bennettville interpretive site adjacent to Lee Vining Creek has “several 100-year-old mining buildings” and “is recognized locally as an important site” (1988 Inyo Forest Plan, pg. 158).

Lee Vining Creek is a popular gateway to both Yosemite National Park and the Mono Basin Scenic Area, which attract visitors from across the nation and around the world. This recreation value is not mentioned in the narrative. The segment of the creek downstream of Highway 395 is visited by hundreds of people who hike along the relatively new Lee Vining Creek Trail from the town of Lee Vining to the Mono Basin Scenic Area Visitors Center, enjoying magnificent views of Mono Lake and the creek’s restored flows and riparian habitat along the way. These constitute outstanding recreation and scenic values.

The fact that much of this lower segment is located within LADWP inholdings should not preclude its eligibility. The Forest Service has full authority to assess streams within the boundaries of the federal reservation it manages (which includes both the Inyo Forest and the Mono Basin Scenic Area). We believe the entire creek within federal reservation boundaries (including segments within inholdings) should be eligible, due to its outstanding historical, recreational, scenic, and hydrological/ecological values.

Lone Pine Creek (pgs. 414-416) – The narrative states of pg. 416 that recreation is associated with visitation to Mt. Whitney and not necessarily “river related.” We disagree. The Whitney Portal National Recreation Trail parallels most of segment 2 and is physically river-related. We think the statement noted above should be stricken from the narrative. In addition, the narrative should acknowledge the opportunity to expand the eligibility finding for this magnificent creek downstream by including at least two miles of the stream on BLM lands within the Alabama Hills Recreation Area the proposed Alabama Hills National Scenic Area. The BLM segment shares identical scenery and recreation values.

Middle Fork San Joaquin River (pg. 418) – This is a new eligible segment. It was not included in the Inyo 1993 Assessment or included in the segments determined eligible and recommended in the 1991-92 Sierra Forest Plan (the Sierra took the lead on assessing segments of the river on the Inyo Forest up to Thousand Island Lake and within Devil’s Postpile National Monument). This new eligible segment enhances the existing recommended segments by including Thousand Island Lake (a nationally recognized waterscape documented worldwide in calendars, magazines, books, and other publications) and its upstream headwaters.

Rock Creek (pgs. 426-429) – The narrative should note that the BLM found a 1.5-mile segment of this creek directly downstream of the Forest boundary (and segment 3) to be eligible in recognition of its outstandingly remarkable recreational, geological, and ecological values. It should recognize that the USFS-BLM segments are complementary and consider revising the Forest Service identified values to include the additional geological (good example of stream erosion through volcanic bedrock) and ecological (excellent aquatic and riparian habitat, biologically diverse vegetation) values identified by the BLM.

Walker Creek (pgs. 436-438) – LADWP diversions from Walker Creek have been discontinued and the approximately three miles of the creek downstream of Walker Lake should be considered free flowing. No outstandingly remarkable historical-cultural value is identified, even though the 1988 Inyo Forest
Plan notes that the Walker-Parker Management Area possesses numerous prehistoric sites and that “Bloody Canyon served as a major prehistoric travel route to the Mono Basin from the San Joaquin Valley.” The Inyo’s 1993 Inventory identified this outstanding cultural value. This outstanding cultural/prehistory value is currently interpreted at the Walker/Bloody Canyon Trailhead. The narrative should be revised to identify an outstandingly remarkable cultural/prehistory value associated with the trail that parallels Walker Creek for much of its length.

**Sequoia Forest Specific Comments:**

We appreciate and support the incorporation into the new Inventory of all eligible streams identified in 1991-95 screening process, including segments of the Little Kern River, North Fork Tule River, North Fork Middle Fork Tule River, Kings River (segments 3-4) and the lower Kern River. We also appreciate and support retention of the suitability recommendation for the short segment of the South Fork Kern studied separately in 1991.

The organization of the Sequoia evaluation results is unnecessarily complicated and difficult for the public to review and comment on. We recommend that the evaluation be organized into three primary sections: (1) All streams assessed, (2) those found to be free-flowing, and (3) those found to be free flowing and to possess one or more outstandingly remarkable values. Footnotes or italics can be used to distinguish between previously and newly inventoried streams. But what is truly important to the public is whether all streams were considered and which ones were included or excluded in this evaluation using FHS criteria.

**Region of Comparison used for the Eligibility Assessment, pg. 439**

It would be helpful if there were explanations as to why the various regions of comparison were chosen for each value. The Sierra Nevada Province region of comparison should be clarified in regard to the Sierra Nevada Bioregion (see comments above). The State of California region of comparison used to identify fish, wildlife, prehistory, history, and botanical values seems overly broad. In addition, there seems to be no reason to use the Sierra Nevada Province as the region of comparison for cultural values, when prehistory and history values are compared statewide.

**Review of Previously Evaluated Inventory, pgs. 441-441**

Some reviewers may be confused by the inclusion in this section of river segments designated by Congress, including the Middle and South Forks of the Kings, the main stem of the Kings, and the North and South Forks of the Kern River. See our comments above about organization of the assessment to improve reviewer understanding.

**1991 Screening Process, pgs. 444-445**

This discussion refers to previous evaluation documents from 1991-95 that are not posted on the Forest Plans website and are therefore not easily available for public review. This reviewer requested and received a copy the 1991-95 evaluation documents. Any documents referred to in Appendix C should

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be available for the entire public for review and comment. This is particularly important because the previous 1991-95 evaluation efforts were not subject to public scoping, review, or comments.

Further, the 1991-95 evaluation is a hodgepodge of lists, memos, field verification reports, and other documents from which it is difficult to parse a coherent picture. What is clear is that a respectable number of streams were narrowed to the four listed as eligible in Appendix C, all without any input from the public or outside experts. Moreover, this past evaluation used old criteria to identify potential outstandingly remarkable values. For example, the criteria used in the previous Sequoia Forest evaluation required historical or cultural sites be included or considered for the National Register, or provide exceptional opportunities for interpretation. The Historic/Cultural criteria in the current FSH is quite broader and National Register status is not mentioned at all.

These comments also apply to “Process to Determine Changed Conditions or New Information since the Previous Evaluation(s)” found on pg. 446.

Results of the Eligibility Review for Previously Evaluated Rivers, pg. 446

The basic finding in this section is that the Sequoia National Forest Interdisciplinary Team found “No changes in eligibility…” and although minor edits and adjustments were made to the narrative, “…these minor changes did not change the original eligibility or classification for any of the previously inventoried or evaluated rivers and stream segments.” For reasons detailed below, we dispute the finding that there are no changed conditions or new information that warrant reconsideration of the hundreds of miles of streams rejected as ineligible in the 1991-95 evaluation. We believe that several of the streams determined ineligible in the 1991-95 evaluation are indeed eligible. In addition, we also dispute some aspects of the eligibility findings. See below for more detailed stream-specific comments.

North Fork Tule River (River/Segment GIS Number 2.160), pg. 450-452

Appendix C confirms the eligibility of a six-mile segment of the North Fork Tule River from where it originates in Sequoia National Park to the Forest Boundary, as a Wild River. The only outstandingly remarkable value identified is recreation associated with the stream being the sole fly-fishing only stream in the southern Sierra Nevada physiographic province designated by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. A cursory internet search found several hits on North Fork Tule fly-fishing, so this value is confirmed indirectly by the opinion of fly fishers active on the internet.

We believe that the North Fork Tule River also possesses an outstandingly remarkable history value associated with the history of logging in the Dillonwood Grove. The North Fork Tule River flows through the heart of the grove, which was named after Nathan Dillon. He owned more than thousand acres of timberland and operated a sawmill beginning in the 1870s, which moved upriver as adjacent lands were logged. A lumber flume was used to transport cut boards down the steep mountain side to the better roads below. After Dillon died in 1903, logging ended. When title shifted to a new owner in 1948, logging resumed, with an estimated 42 million board feet of timber removed over the next decade, including many large Sequoias.

When the land was sold to the Reed family, more sustainable logging was conducted that avoided cutting of the giant Sequoias. By the late 1990s, the Dillonwood Grove was the largest privately owned
grove of giant Sequoias remaining in California. With the assistance of the Save the Redwoods League and through legislation sponsored by Senator Diane Feinstein, the Dillonwood Grove was acquired and became part of Sequoia National Park in 2001.

Eligibility analysis and field variation reports attached to a 1995 memo to the Forest Service from Acting District Ranger Thomas W. Burns recognizes the potential outstandingly remarkable historical and cultural value associated with public interpretation of the Dillonwood Grove but found that “Without the acquisition (of the then privately owned grove) there is not an historical and cultural Outstandingly Remarkable Value to interpret.” Now that the Grove has been acquired (by the Park Service) and given that portions of the Grove are located on the Sequoia Forest and that the historical logging operations proceeded upriver over time, reconsideration of the river’s outstandingly remarkable history value is in order.

We believe that the history of the Dillonwood Grove and the North Fork Tule River represents “a significant event” and “cultural activity of the past that is now rare or unique in the region” (FSH 1909.12-82.73a). This constitutes an outstandingly remarkable history value. Appendix C should be revised to reflect this additional history value.

**North Fork of Middle Fork Tule River (River/Segment GIS Numbers: 1.159.1, 1.159.2), pg. 452-453**

Appendix C confirms the eligibility of a 2.8-mile segment of the North Fork Middle Fork Tule River from its headwaters to the Mountain Home State Forest boundary, possessing outstandingly remarkable ecological value. According to the Appendix C narrative, this value is associated with the Moses Giant Sequoia Grove within the Moses Mountain Research Natural Area (RNA). The narrative states that the RNA, “…by definition possesses natural conditions that have special unique characteristics of scientific interest that provide an opportunity for non-manipulative research.” The narrative explicitly states that the river’s “…ecological outstandingly remarkable value is limited to the upper reaches of the river that flows through the Moses Mountain Research Natural Area.”

The narrative is full of contradictions. Under “Mileage”, the “Studied” segment is listed as 13.5 miles and the “Eligible” segment is “Approximately 2.8 miles, from the headwaters to the State Forest.” In the “Summary of Eligibility Findings”, the narrative states, “The upper 4 miles from the Headwaters to the State Forest is eligible. The remaining 10 miles are not eligible.”

Is the study segment 13.5 miles or 14 miles? Is the eligible segment 2.8 miles or 4 miles? If the eligible segment is truly limited to the segment within the Moses Mountain RNA, then it appears considerably shorter than 2.8 miles on the Sequoia Forest Recreation Map. Whether the eligible segment is 2.8 or 4 miles, that includes more of the river than just the segment within the RNA, which begs the question of whether the evaluation unnecessarily limits the outstandingly remarkable value to the RNA.

The eligibility finding for only a small segment of the North Fork Middle Fork Tule contravenes FSH 1909.12_82.61.2 direction to “Consider the entire river system, including the interrelationship between the main stem and its tributaries and their associated ecosystems which may contain outstandingly remarkable values.”

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The fact is that giant Sequoias are found along much of the length of the North Fork Middle Fork. The Sequoias within the Moses RNA extend downstream through the State Forest. The Silver Creek grove straddles the river just south of the State Forest, as does the Wishon Grove further downstream. Ranging from 4,500 to 7,000 feet in elevation, all these groves contribute to the river’s outstanding ecological value. To limit the value to just the RNA is akin to limiting the outstanding scenic and recreation values of the North Fork Kern Wild and Scenic River to just the Forks of the Kern segment, when all segments of the Kern possess these values to varying degrees. The system was never intended to just “cherry pick” the short river segments with the most outstanding of the outstandingly remarkable value.

Further, we believe that the entire North Fork Middle Fork Tule River from its headwaters to the private property at Doyle Springs possess outstandingly remarkable scenic and recreation values. A popular hiking trail with several trailhead access points parallels most of the river. Beginning at about 4,000 feet elevation at Doyle Springs, the trail provides access to the scenic Moses roadless area, the State Forest (with its campgrounds and extensive trail system), the RNA, the Golden Trout Wilderness, and ultimately the river’s source at Summit Lake in the Sequoia National Park at more than 9,000 feet elevation. From the trail, hikers, equestrians, and mountain bikers can visit numerous cascades and waterfalls, view the rocky massifs of Moses and Maggie Mountains which straddle the canyon, and appreciate the majestic Sequoias and old growth firs and pines that clothe the banks of the river. The diverse landscape and vegetation, including waterfalls, old growth trees and surrounding rocky peaks, and extensive and varied recreation opportunities found along this trail constitute outstandingly remarkable recreation and scenic values.

The North Fork Middle Fork Tule River should be re-evaluated and the entire segment from its headwaters Sequoia National Park to the private property boundary at Doyle Springs determined eligible for its outstanding ecological, scenic, and recreation values.

**Lower Kern River**

Appendix C has no detailed description of the eligible segments of the lower Kern River. The implication is that there are no changed circumstances or new information that warrant reconsideration of the river’s eligibility. However, not only are there changed conditions and new information, the information provided in Appendix is contradictory.

Table C-5, pg. 441, displays the findings of the 1988 Sequoia National Forest LMRP. This document found segments 1 and 2 of the lower Kern to be eligible but not segment 3, which the LRMP claimed was de-watered by hydro power diversions. Table C-5 lists outstandingly remarkable scenic, recreation, and wildlife values for all three segments. Table C-11, pg. 445 shows all three segments to be eligible, but segment 1 only possesses an outstandingly remarkable scenic value (the recreation and wildlife values are dropped). In the Results of the Eligibility Review for Previously Evaluated Rivers on pg. 446, the narrative cites both the 1988 LRMP and a document called “Reply to the Regional Forester April 21, 1994.”

Oddly, the 1994 Reply to the Regional Forester is not included in the packet of 1991-95 eligibility documents provided to this reviewer by the Forest Service. However, we found a copy in our files. The memo states that the outstandingly remarkable wildlife value for segment 1 was dropped because the
Kern Canyon slender salamander was no longer thought to inhabit this segment and that the minimum release from Isabella Dam upstream “does not maintain the recreational values during low water years.”

According to the California Dept. of Fish and the California Wildlife Interagency Wildlife Task Group, the Kern Canyon slender salamander is found from 4,000 to 1,000 feet elevation in the lower Kern River Canyon, which encompasses of segment 1. Californiaherps.com states that the Kern Canyon slender salamander is found in the lower Kern River from its confluence with Erskine Creek to its confluence with Stork Creek. This is confirmed by Robert W. Hansen, Kern River Research Notes Vol. 6, No. 2, 1996. This habitat includes at least a third or more of lower Kern River segment 1. On this basis, we believe that segment 1 does indeed possess an outstandingly remarkable wildlife value associated with the rare Kern Canyon slender salamander.

Since the Forest Service’s 1994 memo, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) conducted an eligibility and suitability evaluation of its 3.2-mile segment of the lower Kern from Isabella Dam to the National Forest boundary. The BLM found this segment to possess outstandingly remarkable scenic, recreation, wildlife, and cultural/historical values. Ultimately, the BLM recommended designation of this segment 3.2-mile segment. The BLM segment includes the upper portion of segment 1 which the Forest Service’s 1994 memo concludes only possesses an outstandingly remarkable recreation value.

Not only did the BLM find a far more extensive outstandingly remarkable wildlife value (“...tremendous variety of micro-climates which provide a wide diversity of habitats...many game and non-game animals...extremely important to neotropical songbirds...bald eagle, spotted owl, osprey...”), it determined that the segment provides outstandingly remarkable water-based recreation in all but low water years. Please note that some of the outstandingly remarkable recreational values of the North Fork Kern Wild and Scenic River are not present in some river segments in low water years due to natural flow variations and hydro diversions. This did not exclude the North Fork from eligibility or designation by Congress.

Another changed condition regards flows in all three segments. Federal relicensing of the various hydroelectric projects that effect flows in the lower Kern River have or will soon improve flows for fish, wildlife, and recreation. This should put to rest any question that flows in the lower Kern are not sufficient to support its outstandingly remarkable scenic, recreation, and wildlife values.

The BLM eligibility finding and suitability recommendation, and FERC-mandated improved flows constitute new information that should have been considered in Appendix C. The lower Kern River should be re-evaluated and found eligible with outstandingly remarkable scenic, recreation, and wildlife values in a revised Appendix C. It is important to note that the lower Kern eligibility findings in the 1994 Regional Forester memo were never subject to formal public review and comment. At the minimum, Appendix C should include the level of detail provided other previously evaluated streams.

Table C-12. Update summary of eligible rivers identified in the past… pg. 454

The second Kings (Seg. 4) column in this table should be “Kings (Seg. 5).” Kings Segment 5 is the segment appropriately classified as recreational. Kings Segment 4 is classified as scenic.

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Sequoia Forest Streams Found Ineligible in the Previous Inventory –

Appendix C has no information on the streams that were determined ineligible in the 1991-95 screening process. As previously noted, the general public cannot comment on these “screened out” streams because the 1991-94 documents are not available on the Forest Plans web site. We believe that there is significant changed circumstances and new information that warrant re-evaluation of some streams that were eliminated in the 1991-95 screening process. In addition, there are examples in the 1991-95 screening documents where narratives fail to support the conclusions of ineligibility. Our stream-specific comments follow.

Salmon Creek – Initial screening documents from 1991-92 identified potential outstandingly remarkable scenic, wildlife, and cultural values. A May 15, 1992 report notes that Salmon Creek’s scenic values consist of “Scenic view of Big Meadow and Salmon Creek gorge.” It also notes that Salmon Creek “appears accessible to the physically challenged at many locations in its upper reaches…”, but this appears to be an outstanding recreation value listed under the scenic value subheading. The same report documents a diversity of recreational opportunities provided by Salmon Creek, including fishing, camping at Horse Meadow Campground, hunting, nature study opportunities in Big and Horse Meadows and along the creek’s riparian habitat (spanning thousands of feet in elevation), and hiking on the Salmon Creek Trail from Big Meadow to Salmon Creek Falls. It also notes an opportunity to develop a trail along the creek for physically challenged visitors.

A more detailed field verification narrative by Cheryl Bauer dated April 12, 1993 conclusively identified what appears to be an outstandingly remarkable scenic value. This narrative states:

The entire Salmon Creek corridor is considered distinctive, or Variety Class A, within the landscape character type. Attractiveness of the corridor is enhanced by the diversity of features that include jagged rock outcrops and peaks, bedrock gorges with cascades and pools, Salmon Creek Falls, and Big Meadow. The Salmon Creek area is accessible to the physically challenged at many locations in its upper reaches.

But then the report concludes, “While the views are excellent, they are typical of scenic qualities in the Kern River area and are not considered to be rare or unique.” Again, note that the accessible recreation value is confused with the scenic value. In addition, the region of comparison appears to be the “Kern River area”, while the Sierra Nevada Province was used as the region of comparison for newly evaluated streams (pg. 439).

We disagree with the ineligibility finding for Salmon Creek made more than 20 years ago and the more recent concurrence in Appendix C. According to WorldWaterfallDataBase.com, Salmon Creek Falls tumbles 450 feet over the edge of the Kern Plateau and is the highest waterfall in the southern Sierra south of Sequoia National Park. The next highest waterfall on the Sequoia Forest – Dry Meadow Creek Falls – is half as high. Salmon Creek Falls is sufficiently notable to have its own sign on the Kern River Highway to apprise tourists of a distant view. Not only does the view of this waterfall constitute an outstandingly remarkable scenic value, it complements the outstanding scenic value of the North Fork Kern Wild and Scenic River.
KernRiverSierra.com describes Salmon Creek Falls as “one of the great natural features of the Southern Sierra” and confirms that it is indeed “the highest waterfall in the Southern Sierra.” The web site goes on to say, “This Yosemitesque creek has inspired adventure and exploration for years… The views are dramatic as Salmon Creek precipitously tumbles over the edge of the Kern Plateau.” The web site notes that the granite cliffs surrounding the falls attract expert rock climbers and was part of the 2002 California Eco-Challenge Finals, where contestants were required to do a 500+ foot rappel near the waterfall and then find a route all the way down to the Kern River.

Modernhiker.com, which generally focuses on trails in southern California features the hike to the lower portion of the falls. It describes the route to lower Salmon Falls as “A short and strenuous little-known trip to an incredible secluded canyon waterfall in the southern Sequoia National Forest, just north of Kernville…you get to see an unbelievable canyon with a majestic waterfall (and sometimes TWO waterfalls in wet years!) in a secluded grove…A surprising and wonderful hike!”

Ann Marie Brown, author of *California Waterfalls* (Foghorn Press, 2000) describes the Salmon Creek Trail to Salmon Falls as “a stellar walk through lodgepole pines and white fir, with a chance for fishing, skinny-dipping, and getting close to the lip of a big waterfall—my idea of a perfect day-trip or an easy one-night backpacking jaunt in early summer.”

Based on the opinions of these experts, Salmon Creek Falls alone gives Salmon Creek an outstandingly remarkable scenic and recreation value. But Salmon Creek’s scenic and recreation value goes beyond the falls. Upstream of the falls, the creek flows through scenic Big and Horse Meadows. Big Meadow is likely the largest meadow in the southern Sierra. An extension of the Salmon Falls Trail extends upstream from Horse Meadow to Big Meadow. From there, trail users can continue north on the Cannell Meadow Trail and then the Siretta Peak Trail to the very headwaters of Salmon Creek, southeast of Siretta Peak.

From its headwaters springs at 9,000 feet elevation, Salmon Creek flows 15 miles to its confluence with the North Fork Kern at 3,500 feet. It’s source spring is located in the Twisselmann Botanical Area, which was established because it supports one of the most diverse subalpine conifer forests in the southern Sierra (including foxtail, limber, western white, Jeffrey, and lodgepole pines, and red and white fir). This area includes the southernmost foxtail pines in the Sierra, as well as the southern-most species of several plants.

The trail system along Salmon Creek traverses two roadless areas. The upper roadless area (formerly known as Woodpecker) is now the West Domeland Wilderness addition recommended in Alternative C. The lower roadless area is Cannell (which includes the Salmon Falls Trail and the falls itself). A portion of this area is also recommended in Alternative C as the Cannell Peak Wilderness.

The potential outstandingly remarkable values of Salmon Creek are supported by the DEIS descriptions of these recommended wilderness areas. The Cannell Peak area has an incredible diversity of plants and animals related to elevation. Huge open meadows provide prime habitat for amphibians. The area has a rich archeological history and is still used extensively by the
Tubatulabal Tribe (DEIS Vol. 2, Appendix B, pg. 287). Domeland West includes the Twisselmann Botanical Area, which “provides a very unique and high value special resource that contributes to the wilderness character of the area” (DEIS Vol. 2, Appendix B, pg. 292).

Joe Fontaine has been working to protect the wild places of the Kern Plateau and the Sequoia Forest for 60 years. He literally wrote the book on the Kern Plateau – *The Kern Plateau and Other Gems of the Southern Sierra* (Joseph Fontaine, 2009), and should be considered the definitive expert on this wild landscape. He first started visiting the plateau in the 1950s by hiking up Salmon Creek to fish for golden trout. On some trips, he would backpack all the way to Big Meadow. According to Joe, “As strenuous as the hike was, the scenery was so inspiring, I never passed up the chance to hike there.” Fontaine believes that the diversity of Salmon Creek meets all required characteristics of wild and scenic river, from its source near Siretta Peak, flowing through Big Meadow and Horse Meadow, and then rumbling through the rocky gorge from which it tumbles over the edge of Plateau at Salmon Creek Creek Falls. “There is no other stream on the Kern Plateau or elsewhere in the Sequoia National Forest with all those attributes in one watershed,” he said.

We believe that Salmon Creek possesses outstandingly remarkable scenic, recreation, and ecological values. We believe that Salmon Creek should be re-evaluated and found eligible in a revised Appendix C. Because it is a major tributary, an eligibility finding for Salmon Creek would complement and help protect the outstandingly remarkable values of the North Fork Kern Wild and Scenic River (per FSH guidance to “consider the entire river system…”).

**Trout Creek** – A Sep. 23-25, 1991 District screening inventory identified potential scenic, recreation, cultural, and ecological values for Trout Creek (including its tributaries, Little Trout Creek, Machine Creek, and Snow Creek). A May 15, 1992 narrative report describes Trout Creek’s scenic value as “A relatively unmodified watershed with spectacular views of domes within the Dome Land Wilderness…” The narrative report for Trout Creek further states:

> The majority of Trout Creek remains in a natural condition and is generally accessible. The streamside corridor in this segment is considered distinctive, or Variety Class A, within the landscape character typ. Waterfalls, a deep rocky canyon, plant species diversity, and spectacular views of the domes within the Dome Land Wilderness enhance the characteristics of this free-flowing stream.

But then the report concludes, “While the views are excellent, they are typical for the Sierra Nevada and do not afford outstandingly remarkable features.” This determination is clearly not supported by the narrative. Trout Creek has distinctive scenery, including spectacular views of domes in the Dome Land Wilderness. We dispute that these scenic values are “typical” of streams throughout the Sierra Nevada. Also please note that the region of comparison for Trout Creek’s scenic value – the Sierra Nevada – is different from Salmon Creek’s – the Kern River area – even though these watersheds are located in the same region and directly adjacent to each other. This suggests that the level of rigor in this evaluation was less than desirable.

In regard to Trout Creek’s wildlife values, the report states:
The feature of most importance to wildlife in the Trout Creek drainage is the Machine, Little Trout, and Snow Creek drainage complex. This area is outstanding as it contains virgin old-growth forests. This type of ecosystem is not common on the District, Forest, or the Southern Sierra. Wilderness areas contain similar features, but this forest may be the southern-most old-growth forest in the Sierra Nevada. In particular, the complex of three drainages is important to several sensitive species requiring mature, closed canopy forests with low levels of disturbance. Species such as the California spotted owl, marten, fisher, and long-tailed weasel are known to use the area. These represent some of the southern-most records for these species.

In addition, the report documents this “Other Similar” value:

The Little Trout Creek tributary flows into the Twisselman’s Botanical Area. The area lies approximately one mile north of Big Meadow and contains 859 acres. One of its unique features is it represents the southern limit of foxtail pine. Foxtail pine is found throughout the area with the exception of some of the lower elevations. Limber pine is also found here at its most southern population in the Sierra Nevada. Altogether, six plant associations are represented in the Botanical Area that form a unique mosaic of vegetation in the southern Sierra Nevada. These associations are: foxtail pine forest, subalpine/mixed conifer forest, red fir forest, rock outcrop, montane chaparral, and mountain meadow-streambank.

Inexplicably and directly contradictory to these detailed narratives, the report concludes that Trout Creek’s old growth ecosystem “is not the only one of its (sic) type in the Sierra Nevadas (sic) and is, therefore, not determined to be a significant feature.” In rebuttal to this erroneous finding, the 1996 Sierra Nevada Ecosystem Project Final Report (Late Successional Old-Growth Forest Conditions, Vol. 1, Chapter 6, Plate 6.2) subsequently confirmed that the Trout Creek watershed includes the southern-most upper montane red fir late successional forest in the southern Sierra Nevada.

Similarly, the report concludes that the Twisselman Botanical Area, even with its unique features, “is not the only one of its (sic) type in the Sierra Nevada and is, therefore, not determined to be a significant feature.” In fact, the narratives clearly identify outstandingly remarkable wildlife, ecological, and botanical values for Trout Creek and its tributaries that are unique to the southern Sierra and therefore outstanding in the context of the entire Sierra Nevada, and perhaps the entire state.

The report also documents diverse recreational opportunities associated with Trout Creek, including fishing, dispersed camping along its entire length, hunting, nature study, and multiple hiking trails. However, it also concludes that these are not outstandingly remarkable. In regard to Trout Creek’s cultural values, the narrative report notes at least five historic and prehistoric sites but concludes that they are not outstandingly remarkable.

Since the 1991-95 evaluation process, new information has become available in regard to Trout Creek. In the 2001 Sierra Nevada Forest Plan Amendment, the Forest Service identified Trout Creek as a Critical Aquatic Refuge (CAR) for California golden trout. CARs are sub-watersheds that contain either known locations of threatened, endangered, or sensitive species; highly vulnerable populations of native
plant or animal species; or localized populations of rare native aquatic- or riparian-dependent plant or animal species. About 1/3rd of Trout Creek, and all its key tributaries (Little Trout, Machine, and Snow Creeks) are unprotected. This CAR represents one of the few California golden trout streams that is not fully protected by wilderness or wild and scenic river designation.

We believe that the previous evaluation failed to identify outstandingly remarkable scenic, wildlife, botanical, and ecological values. In addition, the establishment of the Trout Creek CAR for California golden trout and the fact that much of the creek is unprotected establishes and justifies an outstandingly remarkable fish value. We believe that Trout Creek should be re-evaluated, its outstandingly remarkable scenic, wildlife, fish, botanical, and ecological values correctly identified, and found eligible in a revised Appendix C. Because it is a major tributary, an eligibility finding for Trout Creek would complement and help protect the outstandingly remarkable values of the South Fork Kern Wild and Scenic River (per FSH guidance to “consider the entire river system…”).

Dry Meadow Creek – The Sep. 23-25, 1991 District screening inventory identified potential scenic, recreation, wildlife, cultural, and ecological values. These were confirmed in the Sep. 30, 1991 screening narrative report, which noted that the creek “appears to possess the greatest number of Outstanding Remarkable values” on the Greenhorn Ranger District. Subsequently, Dry Meadow Creek simply disappears from the evaluation, so it is difficult to ascertain why it was ultimately not found to possess any outstandingly remarkable values.

Since the 1991-95 evaluation, Dry Meadow Creek has become world famous for its outstanding class V (with several portages) whitewater kayaking opportunities, particular a set of rapids called the “Seven Teacups.”

According to SierraSouth.com: “Pick your superlative—amazing, awesome, incredible, aesthetic—it would be difficult to overstate the beauty of the "Edge of the World" section of this creek. First run by Gary Gunder and Brandon Prince on a chilly December day in 1995, this creek has become a "must do" for top boaters from around the country, and around the world.”

According to AWetState.com: “It isn’t every day that you get to stand at the lip of so many waterfalls buried deep between two high granite walls.”

According to AmericanWhitewater.com: “One of the most picturesque river reaches on earth.”

Dry Meadow Creek’s outstanding recreation value is not just limited to whitewater kayaking. According to ModernHiker.com: “For entry-level, class C canyoneering, it doesn’t get any better than the Seven Teacups. This is a top-notch route found along Dry Meadow Creek, a tributary of the Kern River in the Sequoia National Forest. A short hike leads to a series of pothole waterfalls cascading down polished granite slabs into the Kern. Then it finishes up with a lovely river walk back to the trailhead.”

There is no indication that these relatively recently recognized recreation values were even considered in the Forest Service’s review of the 1991-95 evaluation.
We believe that Dry Meadow Creek should be determined eligible for its outstandingly remarkable scenic and recreation values. It should be re-evaluated and found eligible in a revised Appendix C. Because it is a significant tributary, an eligibility finding for Dry Meadow Creek would complement and help protect the outstandingly remarkable values of the North Fork Kern Wild and Scenic River (per FSH guidance to “consider the entire river system…”).

**Brush Creek** – The 1991-95 evaluation documents make no mention of Brush Creek, a tributary of the North Fork Kern. Brush Creek is another stream on the Sequoia Forest of great interest to whitewater kayakers. According to American Whitewater, Brush Creek provides a 1.5 miles of outstanding class IV-V whitewater boating with stunning scenery. The run is considered to be one of the best introductions to running waterfalls anywhere. The stream provides the setting of the Brush Creek Down River Race during the Kern River Festival. American Whitewater is not the only whitewater interest that believes Brush Creek is outstanding.

According to SierraSouth.com: “It is a steep creek, dropping 550 vertical feet in about 1.5 miles. If you enjoy steep, rocky drops and running waterfalls, it's a classic.”

According to ColoradoKayaking.com: “Lower Brush Creek is a well-known creeking fun-park. Easy waterfalls and slides of all types can be found on this beautiful tributary to the Kern River in the Southern Sierras. This is a grrrreat beginner creek run for competent class IV boaters.”

Brush Creek offers more than just outstanding whitewater for expert kayakers. According to KernRiverSierra.com, Brush Creek features a trail that parallels a gorgeous steep granite creek to waterfalls. “In the summer, it can be a great place to do a short hike, cool off in a pool, or fly fish.”

We believe that Brush Creek deserves re-evaluation for its possible outstandingly remarkable scenic and recreation values. Because it is a significant tributary, an eligibility finding for Brush Creek would complement and help protect the outstandingly remarkable values of the South Fork Kern Wild and Scenic River (per FSH guidance to “consider the entire river system…”).

**Fish Creek** – This stream was initially identified in the 1991-95 evaluation process as potentially possessing outstandingly remarkable recreation, wildlife, cultural, and ecological values but the Forest Service ultimately determined it to be ineligible. Since the 1991-95 evaluation process, new information has become available in regard to Fish Creek. Similar to Trout Creek, the Forest Service identified Fish Creek as a Critical Aquatic Refuge (CAR) for California golden trout in the 2001 Sierra Nevada Forest Plan Amendment. There is no indication that this new information was even considered in the agency’s review of the 1991-95 evaluation. Because of this, we believe that Fish Creek deserves re-evaluation for its possible outstandingly remarkable fish/ecological values. Because it is a major tributary, an eligibility finding for Rattlesnake Creek would complement and help protect the outstandingly remarkable values of the South Fork Kern Wild and Scenic River (per FSH guidance to “consider the entire river system…”).

**Mill Flat Creek** – The 1991-95 evaluation did not identify any potential outstandingly remarkable values for Mill Flat Creek, a tributary of the Kings River. The Forest Service identified Mill Flat Creek as a Critical Aquatic Refuge (CAR) for western pond turtle and a
Rattlesnake Creek – A tributary of the North Fork Kern, Rattlesnake Creek was initially identified in the 1991-95 evaluations as possessing scenic, recreation, and ecological values but ultimately the Forest Service determined it ineligible. Apparently, it failed reconsideration when the Forest Service reviewed the 1991-95 results for Appendix C. However, the Forest Plan DEIS proposes the entire Rattlesnake Creek drainage as a Critical Aquatic Refuge in Alternative C. Trout Unlimited identified the Rattlesnake Creek watershed as a refuge for Kern River rainbow trout. Because of this, we believe that Fish Creek deserves re-evaluation for its possible outstandingly remarkable fish/ecological values. Because it is a major tributary, an eligibility finding for Rattlesnake Creek would complement and help protect the outstandingly remarkable values of the North Fork Kern Wild and Scenic River (per FSH guidance to “consider the entire river system…”).

Sierra Forest Specific Comments

The Sierra National Forest deserves special recognition for conducting a very expansive and pro-active WSRs inventory. The new inventory identifies 124 segments totaling 640 miles of potentially eligible streams. The Forest also deserves kudos for taking an obvious “river system” approach as recommended in the FSH by identifying as eligible many tributaries of existing and recommended WSRs, including the South Fork Merced, North and Middle Forks San Joaquin, North Fork Kings and the Kings River.

Region of Comparison used for the Eligibility Assessment, pg. 455 –

Please see general comments about Appendix C pgs. 385-386 in regard to the region of comparison. The section on page 455 should at least clarify that the “Sierra Nevada Bioregion” is the assessment region used in the FPRs.

Dinkey Creek (River/Segment GIS Number(s): 3.68.1-4), pgs. 478-482 –

We support the Inventory’s eligibility finding for upper Dinkey Creek (from its source in the Dinkey Lakes Wilderness to Strawberry Meadow) but we are astonished and disappointed that the Forest Service didn’t identified the lower creek below Strawberry Meadow as eligible. No explanation is given. Perhaps the agency believes that the lower creek segments do not possess outstandingly values, in which case, our detailed comments below should resolve this issue.

Even more troubling however is the possibility that the lower creek was not found eligible in order to make it available for future water resources development. Dinkey Creek has been targeted for hydroelectric development in the past, which makes an eligibility determination for the lower creek even more important.
Foreclosing on possible water resources development is not a legitimate eligibility criterion – eligibility studies should focus solely on whether a stream is free flowing and possesses one or more outstandingly remarkable values. It is in the suitability study of eligible rivers where the stream’s wild and scenic characteristics are weighed against “reasonably foreseeable potential uses” that would be “foreclosed or curtailed” if the stream is added to the system (FSH 1909.2_83.21).

Please note that in passing the National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, it was the intent of Congress “to complement” the national policy of dam development with a new “policy that would preserve other selected rivers…in their free flowing condition to protect the water quality of such rivers and to fulfill other vital national conservation purposes” (16 USC Sec. 1271). The Forest Service is failing to fulfill this intent by improperly assessing lower Dinkey Creek as ineligible.

We strongly believe that the entire creek from its source to its confluence with the North Fork Kings River is free flowing and possesses outstandingly remarkable scenic, recreation, geological, historical, cultural, wildlife, and ecological values. Appendix C should be revised to not only include the additional segments of lower Dinkey Creek, but also to recognize all the outstandingly remarkable values of segments 1-4.

**Dinkey Creek Segments, pgs. 478-479 –**

As noted above, we believe that lower Dinkey Creek downstream from segment 4 is eligible, because it is free flowing and possesses several outstandingly remarkable values. This section should be revised to include the additional lower segments and the segments described thusly:

Add Segment 5 – From the end of Segment 4 (a point south of the gauging station and north of Strawberry Meadow) to the Turtle-Ross Creeks confluence (downstream of Ross Crossing). This 6-mile (approximate) segment should be classified as Scenic.

Add Segment 6 – From the Turtle-Ross Creeks confluence to approximately 1-mile upstream of the confluence with the North Fork Kings Rivers. This approximately 6-mile (approximate) segment should be classified as Wild.

Add Segment 7 – From approximately 1 mile upstream of the North Fork Kings River confluence to the North Fork Kings River confluence. This 1-mile (approximate) segment should be classified as Recreational.

Appendix C should be revise to include the additional segments of lower Dinkey Creek.

**Dinkey Creek – Determination of Outstandingly Remarkable Values, pgs. 480-482 –**

Although we appreciate the eligibility findings for Dinkey Creek segments 1-4, we believe the evaluation incorrectly left out some specific outstandingly remarkable values for these segments. By segment, these outstandingly remarkable recreation values include:

**Segment 1 (OR Recreation Value)** – The Forest Service concluded that this segment possesses no outstandingly remarkable recreation value. We disagree. This segment in particular provides...
Wilderness-based recreation, including one of the more popular and easier trails accessing the Dinkey Lakes Wilderness, with opportunities for a six-mile loop trip. When considered together with all other recreation values of the entire creek, this segment stands out and complements the other values by providing a high-elevation recreation experience along the upper creek and its headwater lakes.

**Segment 2 (OR Scenic Value)** – The Forest Service concluded that this segment possesses no outstandingly remarkable scenic values and yet the narrative refers to “unique geological viewing” and the segment itself is bracketed by waterfalls. We believe that this segment possesses outstandingly remarkable scenic values similar to segment 3.

**Segment 3 (OR Recreation Value)** – The Forest Service concluded that this segment possesses no outstandingly remarkable. In fact, this segment is famous for its whitewater recreation value in a spectacular scenic setting that rivals anything in the state. Segment 3 includes the unique “Super Dink” class V kayak run, including “Infinislide” – a long series of smooth granite slides and pools. It is one of the longest rapids of its kind in California. The lower end of this segment offers rare opportunities for campers, visitors, and spectators from the Dinkey Creek Recreation Area to view expert kayakers running the Infinislide and other class V rapids downstream. Below is a sample of what expert kayakers think of this unique run:

“One place with many names, the "Infinislide" section of "SuperDink" on Dinky Creek is the run that Dry Meadow Creek wishes it could be. Half as photogenic; ten times better kayaking… it is certainly worth a yearly pilgrimage and should be high on the list if you have not done it.” – Darin McQuoid, Darin McQuoid Photography, [http://www.darinmcquoid.com/superdink.html](http://www.darinmcquoid.com/superdink.html)

“SuperDink is an amazing section of paddling on Dinkey Creek.” – Paul Martzen, American Whitewater, [http://www.americanwhitewater.org/content/River/detail/id/3960/](http://www.americanwhitewater.org/content/River/detail/id/3960/)

“No, the slide of SuperDink, which gives the run its fame, is an incredible anomaly that is without a doubt the longest slide I've ever run, and is one of the longest slides in the Sierras, somewhere in the quarter mile range.” – Nick Barron, NickyB Kayaking Log, [http://kayaknickyb.blogspot.com/2005/11/superdink-high-water.html](http://kayaknickyb.blogspot.com/2005/11/superdink-high-water.html)

“Dinky Creek is up there with my favorite rivers in the world. Ranking in my top 10 classics for sure. Now adding Upper Dink to my hit list I really love that creek. It's my number 1 recommended run for the Cali season... I will go far enough to say that.” – E.G., [http://egcreekin.blogspot.com/2009_06_01_archive.html](http://egcreekin.blogspot.com/2009_06_01_archive.html)

“Not a lot of class V runs have great spectating. California’s “Super Dink” which is the higher section to the famous multi-day Dinkey Waterfalls is easily accessible from the Dinkey Campground. The lower water levels made the long granite slides a fairly stress free and enjoyable run. While we didn’t know this at the start of the run, we soon found out as ½ of LA seemed to be up for the July 4 holiday while spectating the famous “Infinislide” which is close to ½ mile length!” – CKS Blog, [http://blog.coloradokayak.com/2011/07/super-dink-cali-part-1/](http://blog.coloradokayak.com/2011/07/super-dink-cali-part-1/)
Climbers and canyoneers also frequent this segment to explore the glaciated granite canyon and climb the precipitous cliffs and slopes, as well as the granitic massif of Dinkey Dome. We believe that these recreation values not only stand by themselves, but they are also part of the creek’s overall outstandingly remarkable diverse recreation opportunities.

**Segment 4 (OR Recreation Value)** – The Forest Service concluded that this segment possesses no outstandingly remarkable recreation values. We strongly disagree and are collectively astounded that the agency would find that a stream flowing through the heart of one of the Forest’s most popular recreation areas and that attracts thousands of visitors annually does not possess outstandingly remarkable recreation value. The Forest Service campgrounds, Camp Fresno, and Camp El-O-Win have provided generations of families from Fresno and beyond the region an opportunity to spend quality time along the creek and experience its widely diverse recreational opportunities (camping, picnicking, swimming and wading, hiking, fishing, hunting, photography, and nature study). There are also numerous summer cabins along this segment. The 11.7-mile Dinkey Creek Trail parallels much of this segment, providing access for hikers, backpackers, anglers, swimmers, and mountain bikers. Collectively, these constitute an outstandingly remarkable recreation value.

**Segment 4 (OR History Value)** – The Forest Service concluded that this segment possesses no outstandingly remarkable history value other than the historic Dinkey Creek Bridge. The fact the bridge’s history finding is associated with its National Register status implies that no other factors were considered. We believe that segment 4 possess additional outstandingly remarkable historic value associated with the European emigration into the area, establishment of nearby mining and logging camps, and early development of roads, stores, and cafes to service local workers and public visitors to the McKinley Sequoia Grove. Ultimately, this historic use led to the Dinkey Creek itself becoming a major recreation destination.

Jedediah Smith and his mountain men passed through the Dinkey Creek area in the late 1820’s, but left little trace. In 1841, John Fremont also led an expedition through the area. In 1863, hunters reportedly named the creek for their dog Dinkey who was injured in a fight with a grizzly bear. In 1878, John Muir mentioned the presence of a grove of giant Sequoias named Dinkey (since renamed McKinley) Grove near Dinkey Creek. Early European emigrants to Dinkey Creek prospected for gold and tungsten and grazed sheep in its streamside meadows. One of the earliest maps of the Sierra Nevada by J.N. LeConte (1903) shows two trails leading east to Dinkey Creek near its confluence with Rock Creek and proceeding to the nearby McKinley Sequoia Grove and beyond.

The giant Sequoia trees of the McKinley Grove began attracting recreational visitors in the early 1900s, which led to the construction of the Dinkey Creek Road and the now historic Dinkey Creek Bridge in 1938. Dinkey Creek soon became a popular recreation destination. Jack Ducey built a resort on Dinkey Creek in 1925, which included a hotel, store, café, and bar. Constructed in the 1930’s, the Dinkey Creek Inn included a store, café, and cabins. Originally established by the Forest Service as a camp for firefighters, Camp Fresno was granted to the city in 1928. Over the past eight decades, the Fresno Family Camp has introduced generations of residents from this Central Valley community to Dinkey Creek. Camp El-O-Win was established in 1958 as a Girl Scout summer camp. The camp is now operated by the non-profit Friends of Camp El-O-Win.

The nearby Pine Logging Camp operated from 1939 to 1979 and employed many members of the
Holkoma Band. Single men lived in a bunkhouse while families lived in small cabins. The seasonally operating camp had its own school. Workers from the camp would visit the cafes and bar in Camp Ducey and the Dinkey Creek Inn on weekends.

**Segments 1-4 (OR wildlife/ecological values)** – From its wilderness headwaters, Dinkey Creek flows from an elevation of 9,807 feet at Island Lake through meadows, forests, and granite canyons dropping 7,000 feet over 27 miles to the blue oak woodlands of the western Sierra Nevada foothills. The creek transects a broad elevation range in the Sierra Nevada with no reservoirs or diversions and it may be the longest undammed stream entirely within the boundaries of the Sierra National Forest.

The creek flows through diverse habitat as it carves its way downhill, including alpine lakes and meadows, fir and white pine forests, yellow pine forests, chaparral, and blue oak-foothill pine woodlands and savanna. This habitat diversity supports more than 800 plant species (including three rare plants) and four plant communities, as well as the McKinley Grove of Giant Sequoias.

Although the McKinley Grove is just outside the typical ¼ mile river corridor boundary, there is a definite hydrological and historical connection between Dinkey Creek and the Grove that cannot be ignored. The stream system that drains the Grove flows directly downhill into Dinkey Creek. Dinkey Creek recreational opportunities were developed in part because of public interest in visiting the Grove. For these reasons, we recommend that the McKinley Grove be considered as significantly contributing to the outstanding ecological value of Dinkey Creek.

Old growth coniferous forests along Dinkey Creek provide important habitat for the Pacific fisher, American martin, and other animals dependent on large trees. The creek’s diverse habitat also supports more than 121 species of birds, including the threatened Peregrine Falcon, willow flycatcher, California spotted owl, northern goshawk, great gray owl, and bald eagle. Dinkey Creek provides crucial habitat for the North Fork Kings River deer herd and supports an excellent cold-water trout fishery.

These collectively constitute outstandingly remarkable ecological and wildlife values for all segments of Dinkey Creek.

**Dinkey Creek Segments 5-7 – Outstandingly Remarkable Values**

We believe that lower Dinkey Creek segments 5-7 possess the following outstandingly remarkable values:

**Segment 5 (OR recreation and scenic values)** – Although different in terms of scenery and recreational opportunities from the segments of Dinkey Creek upstream and downstream, this segment offers to hikers and canyoneers an impressive and narrow gorge, including the deep canyon depression known as Muley Hole. The lower portion of the Dinkey Creek Trail provides access for anglers, hikers, and mountain bikers upstream of Muley Hole. The trail-less segment of the creek from Muley Hole to Ross Crossing was described by a canyoneer as:

“…a classic section and a great trip even without any rappels or major drops. This section of Dinkey is a bit more technical and difficult than any of the sections upstream and significantly less technical than the section immediately
downstream. In its own way it is equally as pretty as any other section of Dinkey.” – Paul Martzen, canyoneer and kayaker, http://canyoncollective.com/threads/tr-dinkey-creek-muley-hole-to-ross-crossing.6010/

Ross Crossing offers a rare dispersed camping opportunity popular with kayakers preparing to run the lower gorge, as well as with anglers and hunters, and people avoiding the crowds in the more developed recreation area upstream in segment 4. We believe that these recreation values complement the creek’s outstandingly remarkable recreation and scenic values in the upstream segments.

Segment 6 (OR recreation and scenic values) – Much of this segment flows through the Sycamore Springs roadless area, which is recommended for wilderness in Alternative 3. The Forest Service’s wilderness evaluation handily identify this segment’s outstandingly remarkable scenic and recreation values (including whitewater kayaking, canyoneering, hiking, fishing, and hunting). According to DEIS Vol. 2, Appendix B, pg. 190:

“Dinkey Creek provides an outstanding opportunity for challenge and self-reliance for kayakers and canyoneers. Numerous waterfalls exist on Dinkey and its tributaries in the area, followed by eroded, deep plunge pools. Black Rock, Patterson Bluffs and Indian Rock are highly scenic granite features”

The segment’s outstandingly remarkable recreation and scenic values are more than confirmed by the opinions of the expert whitewater kayakers who have documented and extolled the whitewater virtues and spectacular scenery of this segment. For example:

“Dinkey Creek has made the transition from hardcore expedition paddling to a modern classic. This once rarely paddled run has become a marquee destination for both out of state boaters and local paddlers. With warm weather almost guaranteed due to low elevation and a somewhat southern Sierra location, Dinkey Creek is a true gem of California.” – Darin McQuoid, Darin McQuoid Photography, http://www.darinmcquoid.com/dinkeycreek.html

“In my opinion, Dinkey Creek encompasses some of the best six miles of kayaking you can find anywhere in the world…” – Laura Farrell, Living the Liquid Lifestyle, http://theliquidlifestyle.blogspot.com/2012/05/dinkey-creek-my-favorite-six-miles-of.html

“The Dinkey Waterfalls is six and half miles of some of the biggest, cleanest and most continuous whitewater found anywhere in the world.” – Joe Ravenna, SMAX Bros. Adventure ON!, http://www.smaxbros.com/2012/dinkey-creek-by-joe-ravenna

“Dinkey Creek is one of the most action packed runs in California…This run is one of the many classics that make California one of the world’s best paddling destinations.” – Dan Simenc, Kayak Diaries, http://www.kayakdiaries.com/2011/08/18/dinkey-creek-waterfalls/
“Everything that you read about the waterfall section of Dinkey is true. The scenery is out of this world, the endless drops are big and clean, separated by big pools, and the canyon is truly amazing. It is a six-mile stretch of whitewater that will put an ear to ear grin on any paddler’s face!” – Dan McCain, NRS – The Duct Tape Diaries, [http://community.nrs.com/duct-tape/2015/04/10/big-challenge-on-dinkey-creek/](http://community.nrs.com/duct-tape/2015/04/10/big-challenge-on-dinkey-creek/)

“This section is now boated each year by expert boaters and is considered to be an outstanding run. Dinkey has become a favorite for many. Canyoneers will find this section fun and plenty challenging at low flows in the late summer.” – American Whitewater, [https://www.americanwhitewater.org/content/River/detail/id/179/](https://www.americanwhitewater.org/content/River/detail/id/179/)

Segment 7 (OR recreation/scenic values) – This short mile segment provides the “take out” for the class V whitewater run upstream, as well as cross-country access for canyoneers and anglers. Many of “highly scenic granite features” cited in Appendix B are visible from this segment.

Segments 5-7 (OR ecological/wildlife values) – See the section for segments 1-4. Segments 5-7 add to the diversity of ecosystems and wildlife habitat.

Dinkey Creek Conclusion –

We believe that Appendix C should be revised to recognize the eligibility of lower Dinkey Creek segments 5-7, and that additional outstandingly remarkable values should be identified for segments 1-4.

Granite Creek (River/Segments GIS Number: 3.107.2-3) pgs. 495-496 –

Although 7.2 miles of Granite Creek were studied, only a 2-mile segment of its mid-reach was determined eligible because of its prehistory value. We believe that the entire 7-mile segment also possesses outstandingly remarkable scenic value. The narrative already describes the creek as flowing through a glaciated landscape, flowing over bedrock into the San Joaquin River. On pgs. 487 and 561, the evaluation identified similar “glaciated landscape” outstandingly remarkable scenic values for the upstream eligible segments of the West and East Forks Granite Creek. And the scenic values of the bedrock canyon through which the recommended as suitable San Joaquin River flows are identical to the lower segment of Granite Creek. May of the scenic features cited, such as Balloon Dome are visible from lower Granite Creek. Failing to find the middle segment of Granite Creek to be eligible ignores the FSH guidance to follow a “river system” approach. We believe the entire 7.2-mile segment of Granite Creek should be found eligible due to its outstandingly remarkable scenic value and Appendix C revised accordingly.

Mono Creek (River/Segment GIS Number: 3.166.1-4) Segment 2 Classification, pgs. 516-517 –

Segment 2 is given a preliminary classification of recreational apparently based on “motorized and non-motorized trails.” And yet, the entire segment appears to be in located in the John Muir Wilderness, where motorized use is prohibited. Segment 2 should be classified as wild and all WSR eligibility maps adjusted accordingly.
Laurel Creek (River/Segment GIS Number: 3.137), pg. 506

Laurel Creek is given a preliminary classification of recreational, even though the entire creek is located within the John Muir Wilderness.

North Fork Kings River (River/Segment GIS Number: 3.177.1-5), pgs. 520-524 –

Segment 2 is given a preliminary classification of recreational due to “motorized and non-motorized” trails. And yet, almost the entire segment except for about a mile of the river directly upstream of Wishon Reservoir is located in the John Muir Wilderness and should be classified wild. WSR eligibility maps adjusted accordingly.

Rancheria Creek (River/Segment GIS Number: 3.207), pgs. 533-534 –

Rancheria Creek is given a preliminary classification of scenic, even though the creek upstream of the Statham Creek confluence is located in the John Muir Wilderness. It should be classified as wild and all WSR eligibility maps adjusted accordingly.

San Joaquin River (River/Segment GIS Number: 3.233.1-6), pgs. 540-543 –

Segment 4 is given a preliminary classification of recreational, even though most of the segment is located in a roadless area that is recommended for wilderness in Alternative C. The Mammoth Pool powerhouse and associated power lines and access roads may be the primary reason for the recreational classification. The segment should be adjusted to exclude these developments so that most of segment 4 is classified as wild. WSR eligibility maps adjusted accordingly.

WSR Maps – Figure C-80, DEIS Vol. 2, Appendix C, pg. 586; Map 88, DEIS Vol. 3, pg. 94; Figure 13, Sierra National Forest DRFP, pg. 127 –

As previously noted in the general comments on the overall WSR evaluation process, the maps showing existing, suitable, and eligible WSRs lack important detail, such as names and background hydrology. In addition, the color scheme used to delineate classifications is difficult to differentiate. The lack of map detail is particularly troublesome for the Sierra Forest, which identified many eligible segments. We have been unable to compare every mapped eligible segment with the appropriate narratives due to the lack of names on the maps.

The lack of detailed maps with stream names is also troubling because it makes it difficult for reviewers to realize that the Sierra Forest followed the “river system” approach required by the FSH. Most of the eligible streams are tributaries to existing or recommended WSRs, but it is difficult to discern this because of the less than detailed maps.
Appendix IX.A: Areas Improperly Excluded from Alternative C on the Sierra and Sequoia National Forests

We request that the following roadless areas be recommended for wilderness in a revised-version of Alternative C.

**Cat’s Head Mountain (Sierra NF polygon 304) – 5,888 acres**

Cat’s Head is something that is quite rare in the Sierra Nevada: a low-elevation roadless area that is over 5,000 acres in size. Most federal wild places are at mid to high-elevations because of the homesteading, logging, mining, and other development activities that removed low-elevation lands from the public domain. The roadless area ranges in elevation from 3,460 feet atop Cat’s Head Mountain to 1,124 feet near Sycamore Creek. The area’s rugged slopes are covered with oak woodlands, grasslands and chaparral, with small groves of cedar and ponderosa pine in shaded pockets. The area includes over 1,800 acres of oak woodland. Given its low-elevation and plentiful forage, the area is important winter deer habitat. Deep Creek dominates the central portion of the area, and despite its seasonal nature, pools of water can be found in the canyon year-round.

According to the California Natural Diversity Database, the area includes habitat for Bald eagle, California condor, California spotted owl, Cooper's hawk, Farnsworth's jewel-flower, fisher, Fresno ceanothus, great gray owl, northern goshawk, osprey, prairie falcon, sharp-shinned hawk, streambank spring beauty, thread-leaved beakseed, western mastiff bat and western pond turtle. The USFS notes that the vast majority of the area contains habitat types that “have less than 20 percent of their national extent protected in the National Wilderness Preservation System. The most prevalent are California Central Valley mixed oak savanna, California lower montane blue oak-foothill pine woodland, Mediterranean California mixed oak woodland, and Mediterranean California mesic mixed conifer forest and woodland.” DEIS Appx. B at 142.

The roadless area contains the popular Deep Creek Trail and Bobs Flat Trail. Unlike many of the SNF’s trails, these routes remain open when other trails are covered in snow. The USFS notes in the DEIS that the area is of ongoing cultural importance to local Native Americans. DEIS Appx. B at 188-189.

**Golden Trout Wilderness Additions (Sequoia NF polygon 1387) – At least 58,166 acres**

The Forest Service improperly excluded 58,166 acres of the Golden Trout Wilderness Additions (polygon 1387) from Alternative C. The agency’s rationale for not carrying this area forward is unclear, but appears to be based on the presence of motorized trails and some roads identified as unneeded through travel analysis, as well as potential associated impacts on opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation. See DEIS Appx. B at 370. As explained elsewhere in this comments, these rationales are faulty and represent a misapplication of Chapter 70 criteria. We believe that the entire 89,627-acre polygon should be analyzed in Alternative C.

Much of this area was part of the original Golden Trout Wilderness proposal and conservationists and some Forest Service personnel (notably former Sequoia Forest Supervisor Norman Norris) have advocated for its protection for decades. This addition is part of the
Rincon IRA, which represents a significant chunk of the largest complex of unroaded lands in the Sierra Nevada, stretching from the Tioga Pass Road in Yosemite National Park in the north to the Sherman Pass Road (22S05) on the Sequoia NF in the south—a distance of more than 150 miles. The Rincon region has great ecological diversity due to its wildness, size, and elevations ranging from 3,000 feet along the Kern River, to almost 10,000 feet atop Lookout Mountain. Our recommended wilderness addition contains critically-important oak woodlands, old-growth mixed conifer forests and other ecosystems that are poorly represented in both the NWPS and in the Sequoia NF. Protecting this area would preserve a continuous uninterrupted transition of ecosystems from the drier brushy areas along the North Fork Kern River to the conifer forests of the Kern Plateau. Protecting such transition zones is especially important during a time of climate change. Because it includes Rattlesnake and Durwood Creeks and other major tributaries to the North Fork Kern, adding this area to the Golden Trout Wilderness will help protect the North Fork Kern Wild and Scenic River’s water quality and biotic integrity.

The USFS notes that the “The area is important for habitat connectivity for the Pacific fisher, several species of slender salamander, mountain yellow-legged frogs and soon to be reintroduced Kern River rainbow trout.” DEIS Appx. B at 154. Durrwood Creek is an untouched watershed that contains golden trout. The proposed additions are also summer range for deer migrating from Sequoia-Kings Canyon National Park. According to the California Natural Diversity Database, the Rincon region includes habitat for Abram’s onion, American peregrine falcon, bald eagle, black-backed woodpecker, Blandow’s bluish spike-moss, California spotted owl, California wolverine, clustered-flower cryptantha, Cooper’s hawk, cut-leaf checkerbloom, Dedecker’s clover, Fairview slender salamander, few-flowered eriastrum, fisher, foothill yellow-legged frog, golden eagle, Greenhorn fritillary, grey-leaved violet, Hall’s daisy, hidden rockcress, Kern Canyon clarkia, Kern ceanothus, Kern County milk-vetch, Kern Plateau bird’s-beak, Kern Plateau horkelia, Kern Plateau milk-vetch, Kern Plateau salamander, Kern River daisy, Lewis’ woodpecker, limestone dudleya, Little Kern golden trout, Madera leptosiphon, marsh claytonia, marten, Mount Pinos sooty grouse, Nine Mile Canyon phacelia, northern goshawk, northern sagebrush lizard, osprey, prairie wedge grass, pygmy paws, relictual slender salamander, San Joaquin kit fox, sharp-shinned hawk, Shevock’s milk-vetch, Shevock’s rockcress, short-bracted bird’s-beak, Sierra marten, Sierra Nevada monkeyflower, Sierra Nevada red fox, Sierra Nevada yellow-legged frog, southern mountain yellow-legged frog, southern Sierra woolly sunflower, spotted bat, The Needles buckwheat, Transverse Range phacelia, Tulare County rockcress, willow flycatcher, Wright’s jeffueliobryum moss, and Yosemite lewisia.

Recreation use in the area is increasingly limited due to the lack of maintained trails. However, the jewel-like meadows with their aspen groves and the area’s larger streams attract hikers, anglers, hunters and other visitors.

**Oat Mountain (Sierra NF polygon 227) – 10,922 acres**

In our proposal, we have excluded all private inholdings and motorized vehicle routes that are open to the public in order to develop a viable wilderness recommendation that does not pose the kinds of conflicts described in the DEIS. Our proposed boundary is therefore the private land and powerline and the associated unnamed road on the west, Pine Flat Reservoir, private lands, and
Road 12S01 on the north, Road 12S01 on the east, and private lands and Roads 13S86, 13S94 and 12S19 on the south.

During this planning process conservationists have worked hard to emphasize the importance of protecting low-elevation habitats in the Sequoia and Sierra, particularly oak woodlands, in order to maintain and restore habitat connections across the landscape, increase the ecological diversity of the Forest Service’s system of protected areas, and to provide protection to critically important habitat types that have historically been overlooked in favor of alpine or subalpine landscapes. In fact, the USFS notes in the DEIS that the entirety of this roadless area consists of habitat types that “have less than 20 percent of their national extent protected in the National Wilderness Preservation System. The most prevalent are California Central Valley mixed oak savanna, California lower montane blue oak-foothill pine woodland, Mediterranean California mixed oak woodland, and Mediterranean California mesic mixed conifer forest and woodland.” DEIS Appx. B at 142.

According to the California Natural Diversity Database, the Oat Mountain area offers habitat for American manna grass, American peregrine falcon, bald eagle, Berry's morning-glory, California spotted owl, Call's angelica, elongate copper moss, fisher, flammulated owl, foothill yellow-legged frog, golden eagle, great gray owl, Kaweah monkeyflower, Kings River buckwheat, limestone dudleya, Madera leptosiphon, osprey, Sierra Nevada red fox, southern Sierra woolly sunflower, streambank spring beauty, thread-leaved beakseed, Tompkins' sedge, Townsend's big-eared bat, valley elderberry longhorn beetle and western pond turtle.

The proximity of Oat Mountain to Pine Flat Reservoir provides the Sequoia National Forest with an opportunity to build one or more foot and horse trails from the reservoir to the interior of the area. This would enhance the recreation opportunities available at Pine Flat and offer a low-elevation trail that can be enjoyed in winter and spring when most of the region’s paths are still snowbound. The area is already known for its spring wildflower displays.

**Piute Mountains – Bright Star Additions (Sequoia NF polygon 1426) – 49,759 acres**

Note: The actual acreage may vary given that we propose that the USFS use a collaborative process with stakeholders to develop a wilderness recommendation.

This extremely rugged portion of the Piute Mountains rises like a series of uneven steps from desert washes at about 3,200 feet to Inspiration Point at 7,800 feet. The Piute Mountains are noted for offering breathtaking vistas in all directions, distinctive rock formations and, most of all, astonishing ecological diversity.

This diversity results from the fact that four radically-different ecological regions come together in this roadless area, including the Sierra Nevada, Transverse Range, Mojave Desert and Central Valley. As a result, visitors to the Piute Mountains can see a mixture of plants whose ranges rarely overlap, such as blue oak and Mojave tarweed. This extremely unusual mixture of plant and animal communities makes the Piute Mountains an excellent location for scientists to study rapid evolution and ecosystem development. Studying these processes and protecting such critical habitat linkages as the Piute Mountains will only become more important in the years ahead as we struggle to cope with the impacts of climate change.
According to the California Natural Diversity Database, the Piute Mountains are home to a long list of species of interest or concern, including Adobe yampah, alkali mariposa-lily, American badger, Bacigalupi's yampah, Bendire's thrasher, Breedlove's buckwheat, California androsace, California spotted owl, coast horned lizard, Comstock's blue butterfly, Death Valley sandmat, fisher, foothill yellow-legged frog, fragile pentachaeta, golden eagle, grey-leaved violet, inland gilia, Kelso Creek monkeyflower, Kern Canyon clarkia, Kern Canyon slender salamander, Kern County evening-primrose, Kern County milk-vetch, Kern red-winged blackbird, Kern River evening-primrose, large-flowered nemacladus, limestone dudleya, lodgepole chipmunk, long-legged myotis, Mojave paintbrush, Mojave tarplant, Mount Pinos larkspur, northern goshawk, pallid bat, Palmer's mariposa-lily, Palmer's spineflower, Parish's checkerbloom, Piute cypress, Piute Mountains jewelflower, Piute Mountains navarretia, prairie falcon, rose-flowered larkspur, round-leaved filaree, San Bernardino aster, San Joaquin pocket mouse, Shevock's golden-aster, Sierra Nevada monkeyflower, Tehachapi monardella, Tehachapi Mountain silverspot butterfly, Townsend's big-eared bat, Tracy's eriastrum, Transverse Range phacelia, tricolored blackbird, unexpected larkspur, western pond turtle, white pygmy-poppy, willow flycatcher and yellow-eared pocket mouse. In its wilderness evaluation, the USFS notes that the area offers “important habitat connectivity for the Pacific fisher.” DEIS Appx. B at 171.

The Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail (PCT) briefly enters the Bright Star Wilderness Additions in its southeastern corner. Other than the PCT, all non-motorized recreation use in the Piute Mountains is either cross-country or on one of the area’s low-grade vehicle routes. Despite the presence of these routes, the region maintains a high degree of wilderness due to its ruggedness, large size and the very minor nature of most of the motorized trails crossing the area. Efforts in Congress to designate all or portions of the roadless area as wilderness have included:

- The Sequoia Ecosystem and Recreation Preserve Act of 1996 introduced by Representative George E. Brown, Jr. It would have added 30,398 acres of the roadless area to the Bright Star Wilderness. It was reintroduced twice (in 1997 and 1999) before Mr. Brown retired from Congress.

- The California Wild Heritage Act of 2002 introduced in the Senate by Senator Barbara Boxer (as S. 2535) and in the House by Representative Hilda Solis (as H.R. 4947). It would have added 48,000 acres of the roadless area to the Bright Star Wilderness. It was reintroduced in 2003, 2006 and 2007 before Senator Boxer switched from working on statewide wilderness legislation to House district-specific measures.

Conservationists will continue to fight to protect the wildest remaining portions of the Piute Mountains as wilderness. Given that the USFS is currently engaged in transportation planning for the Piute Mountains, the agency could decide to work with conservationists, OHV enthusiasts, mountain bikers and others to develop a wilderness recommendation for the Bright Star Additions as part of that process. Such a proposal could guide future legislation even as it promotes the kind of collaboration among stakeholders that is supposed to be at the heart of the new planning regulations. We request that the Sequoia NF commit to this process in the final version of the Preferred Alternative.
Soaproot Mountain (Sierra NF polygon 357) – 5,888 acres
While small, the Soaproot area nevertheless offers a rare resource: a low-elevation (2,000-4,000 foot) Sierra Nevada roadless area. It is characterized by chaparral, dry meadows, blue oak woodlands and patches of conifers along drainages. Large granite outcrops occur throughout the area. According to the California Natural Diversity Database, the area offers habitat for gregarious slender salamander, foothill yellow-legged frog, Sierra Nevada yellow-legged frog, Coast Range newt, northern goshawk, sharp-shinned hawk, bald eagle, osprey, American peregrine falcon, great gray owl, California spotted owl, willow flycatcher, Sierra Nevada red fox, Sierra marten, fisher, long-legged myotis, Yuma myotis, western pond turtle, southern Sierra woolly sunflower, orange lupine, tree-anemone, marsh claytonia, Yosemite lewisia, Fresno County bird's-beak, slender-stalked monkeyflower, small-flowered monkeyflower, cut-leaved monkeyflower, Madera leptosiphon, Ewan's larkspur, Fresno ceanothus and Yosemite ivesia. While it has no trails, it offers opportunities for the USFS to develop low-elevation foot and horse paths that are closer to Fresno and other communities and that will be open in winter and spring when most trails in the Sierra National Forest are covered by snow.
Appendix IX.B: Alternative C Recommended Wilderness Areas, Sequoia and Sierra National Forests

Sequoia National Forest

Cannell Peak (polygon 1384), pgs. 287-288 –
The proper spelling of “Cannel” appears to be “Cannell” according to most maps. The RARE II boundary was adjusted southward in Alternative C to exclude much of Salmon Creek from the recommended wilderness. Salmon Creek is a key water feature of this scenic area. The Alternative C boundary also excludes almost the entire Salmon Falls Trail, an important primitive recreation feature in a virtually trail-less area. The boundary should be moved northward to include the Salmon Falls Trail, Salmon Creek, and the rugged, unroaded, and unlogged north slope of the canyon. The boundary should be established south of Road 23S41, its spurs, and the adjacent logged areas. The road to the Salmon Falls Trailhead should be cherry-stemmed. The northwestern and southern boundaries of the Cannell Peak recommended wilderness are unnecessarily set back more than a half mile from the Rincon and Cannell Meadow motorized trails. More of the North Fork Kern River canyon and portions of Cannell Creek could be added to the recommended wilderness if the motorized trail setbacks were reduced. Including more of Salmon Creek in the recommended wilderness would contribute to water quality and biotic integrity of the North Fork Kern Wild and Scenic River. These areas seem to have been excluded due to illegitimate “sights and sounds” criteria (pg. 368).

Dennison Peak (polygon 190), pgs. 290-291 –
No maps of the recommended Moses Wilderness in the Giant Sequoia National Monument appear to be available to the public. It would be useful if the public knew where the recommended Moses area is in regard to the recommended Dennison Peak wilderness. Are they adjacent? If they are contiguous, shouldn’t the narrative note that these areas together make up a much larger wilderness recommendation? In addition, motorized use of Road 19S09 ends at a locked gate near Jenny Creek. If the road upstream of the gate leading to Dillonwood Grove is no longer used for motorized access, the evaluation should consider adding the adjacent segment of the North Tule River to the recommended wilderness. This would add important recreation values associated with the North Fork’s catch and release trout fishery as well as scenic waterfalls and cascades in the river and lower Jenny Creek. In addition, the interesting history of the Dillonwood Grove adds to the overall value of the recommended wilderness.

Domeland West Addition (polygon 1394), pgs. 292-295 –
The boundary of this recommended wilderness appears to accidently include a short segment of the Cannell Meadow motorized trail in sections 17-20, T23S, R34E. We assume that the Forest Service doesn’t intend to close a portion of this trail to motorized use. We strongly support the inclusion of the Siretta Pass Trail and much of the Twisselman Botanical Area in this recommended wilderness. The statement that “The Siretta Trail is identified in the Mediated Settlement of 1990 for removal and/or replacement” is not quite correct. It was identified for closure to motorized use. Recent field checking of the Siretta Pass Trail found no evidence that motorcycles or any wheeled vehicle had recently traveled the Siretta Trail beyond the first hundred yards of its junction with the Cannell Meadow Trail. The “Wilderness Characteristics” section should be revised to note that inclusion of Trout Creek and its tributaries (Little Trout,
Machine, and Snow Creeks) will protect one of the last remaining old growth forests in the southern Sierra and many wildlife species dependent on this habitat. It should also note that the addition will protect much of the watershed of Trout Creek, which supports the sensitive California golden trout. Protecting Trout Creek in the recommended wilderness will also help protect water quality and biotic integrity of the South Fork Kern Wild and Scenic River.

**Golden Trout Additions (1) (polygon 1387), pgs. 298-301**
The small addition north of Lion Meadows is all that remains of a much larger addition initially recommended in the preliminary evaluation released for public input in late 2015. More than 58,000 acres encompassing Rattlesnake and Durwood Creeks – both which flow into the North Fork Kern Wild and Scenic River – were eliminated as recommended wilderness in Alternative C. Please see our comments (Appendix A) about areas excluded from Alternative C.

**Long Canyon (polygon 162), pgs. 309-310**
The narrative for this recommended wilderness should note that elevation ranges from slightly above 1,500 feet to 6,000 feet. Due to this elevation range, the area includes ecosystems and vegetation types underrepresented in the NWPS. Wilderness protection for the area will also help protect water quality in the South and Middle Forks Tule River. Because it is a tribal fuels emphasis area, Long Canyon represents an excellent opportunity to reintroduce a natural fire regime in protected wilderness.

**Slate Mountain (polygon 160), pgs. 315-316**
The “Wilderness Characteristics” section for this recommended wilderness in Alternative C fails to document the area’s obvious wilderness qualities. These include the presence of the Summit National Recreation Trail, which bisects much of the area, and other trails that access its outstanding giant Sequoia groves in the northern portion of the area. Another wilderness characteristic is the Slate Mountain Botanical Area, which supports an unusually large variety of very rare wild plants concentrated on the rocky outcrops and crevices along the 9,000-foot high ridge of Slate Mountain. Most of the plants are found only in a few high alpine areas of Tulare County. The Quaking Aspen, Belknap, and Coy Flat Campgrounds are directly adjacent to the area and provide ideal basecamps for hikers and backpackers to explore the recommended wilderness.

**Stormy Canyon (polygon 1408), pgs. 320-321**
While recommended as wilderness in Alternative C, the “Wilderness Characteristics” section notes that “Sounds from motorized activities outside the area could interfere with opportunities for solitude.” Again, “sights and sounds” is not a legitimate criterion to use when evaluating wilderness. It is true that there are heavily used recreation areas adjacent to the eastern boundary of the area. But the description fails to note that the visitors using those recreation areas appreciate the undeveloped view across the river of the Stormy Canyon recommend wilderness. This contributes significantly to the outstandingly remarkable scenic and recreation values of the North Fork Kern Wild and Scenic River. Protecting the area as wilderness would also protect the North Fork’s water quality and biotic integrity.

**Sierra National Forest**
Ansel Adams Addition (polygon 819), pgs. 324-326 –
This rather oddly shaped recommended wilderness deserves some explanation. It primarily encompasses the steep slopes and deeply-incised glaciated canyon of the San Joaquin River. Even though it appears quite narrow on a map, a visitor isn’t aware of the adjacent developed areas high above and out of sight on and beyond the canyon rim. The “Wilderness Characteristics” section notes the presence of Mammoth Pool Reservoir within the area and hydroelectric facilities adjacent to the area. This is not unusual – there are a number of reservoirs located within existing wilderness areas and their appurtenant facilities (powerlines, etc) are often found just outside the boundaries. The narrative should be revised to note that the recommended wilderness will help protect segments of the San Joaquin River found eligible for wild and scenic river status and provide an important protected corridor for the migration of species in response to climate change.

Ansel Adams Granite Creek Additions (polygon 822), pgs. 327-330 –
The “Summary of Factors Considered” section should be revised to note the wilderness protection of this area under Alternative C will help protect water quality and biotic integrity of the segments of the West and East Forks of Granite Creek determined eligible for wild and scenic river protection.

Ansel Adams Mt. Raymond Additions (polygon 821), pgs. 332-333 –
The narrative fails to note that recommended wilderness addition includes a segment of the South Fork Merced Wild and Scenic River, several of its tributaries, and a good chunk of its watershed. It should be revised to note that the recommended wilderness will help protect the river’s outstandingly remarkable values, water quality, and biotic integrity.

Bear Mountain (polygon 539), pgs. 334-336
The narrative fails to note that a segment of Dinkey Creek determined eligible for wild and scenic river protection flows through the heart of the recommended wilderness. The recommended wilderness will help protect the outstandingly remarkable scenic and recreation values of Dinkey Creek, as well as its water quality and biotic integrity.

Devil Gulch and Ferguson Ridge (polygon 772), pgs. 337-339 and 344-345 –
The Devil Gulch and Ferguson Ridge recommended wilderness areas are actually one area, divided by a jeep trail. The southern portion of the OHV trail to Hite Cove is a legal public route, although the Forest Service should probably consider its closure to protect the outstandingly remarkable values of the South Fork Merced Wild and Scenic River. The northern portion of this jeep trail from Hite Cove to Highway 140 appears to provide access to some private inholdings and mining claims but seems to be officially closed to public use (It’s not marked on the 2011 Sierra National Forest map and the MVUM for this area doesn’t appear to be available on the Sierra Forest web site.). We recommend that the southern segment of the OHV trail be closed or at least cherry-stemmed in the recommended wilderness. The northern segment is at best a non-conforming use providing access for landowners but appears closed to public motorized access. There is no reason to cherry stem it. This would connect the Ferguson area to the west with Devil Gulch to the east, allowing the entire area to be treated as one wilderness. There is also what appears to be a non-public road that begins at Highway 140 and climbs south to and a bit beyond Pinoche Ridge. The map for the Devil Gulch area cherry stems this road even though it doesn’t
appear to be available for public motorized use (again, it’s not shown on the 2011 Sierra National Forest map) and it does not appear to access any private inholdings. If there is indeed no public use or need for this road, it should be permanently removed and the cherry stem eliminated from the recommended wilderness. The narrative should be revised to note that the entire Devil Gulch-Ferguson Ridge recommended wilderness helps protect the outstandingly remarkable scenic and recreation values of the South Fork Merced Wild and Scenic River, as well as its water quality and biotic integrity.

**John Muir Wilderness Additions West (polygons 795, 797), pgs. 349-350**

We don’t understand why an underground tunnel is cherry stemmed through the recommended wilderness. There is no surface sign of this tunnel on Google Earth. The upper portion of the underground tunnel is not cherry stemmed in the existing John Muir Wilderness. We see no valid reason to cherry stem a tunnel not apparent on the surface through the recommended wilderness additions.

**Monache Wilderness Addition West (polygon 1378), pgs. 351-353**

An area south of Verplank Saddle, east of the 27E03 motorcycle trail, and north of the Kings River has been excluded from the recommended wilderness. According to the Sequoia National Forest MVUM, it has no authorized motorized roads or trails and it should be added to the wilderness. The narrative should be revised to state that this wilderness addition will help protect the outstandingly remarkable scenic and recreation values, water quality, and biotic integrity of the segment of the Kings River eligible for wild and scenic protection. It should also note the presence of giant Sequoias in the far southern portion of the recommended area, which adds to its wilderness qualities.

**Sequoia National Forest**

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presence of giant Sequoias in the far southern portion of the recommended area, which adds to its wilderness qualities.
Appendix IX.C: Alternative C Recommended Wilderness Areas, Inyo National Forest

This appendix provides descriptions of some of the areas on the Inyo National Forest that are highly deserving of recommended wilderness designation in the final plan. The areas described are in no way exclusive of the areas in Alternative C that warrant protection as recommended wilderness. Some of the areas described are also included in Alternative B and should be retained as recommended wilderness in the final plan.

Ansel Adams Addition
This addition represents the transitional slope from the floor of the Mono Basin to the mid-slope boundary of the Ansel Adams Wilderness. Lands in this polygon support mature, mixed conifer forests in Gibbs, Bloody and especially Sawmill canyons. Extensive, old-growth mixed conifer forest of this transitional zone is currently poorly represented in Wilderness on the Inyo National Forest. This mixed conifer zone is also unique for its diversity and inclusion of relatively rare conifer species in this zone of the Inyo National Forest – namely healthy limber pines in Bloody Canyon. The southern section of the Parker Bench Inventoried Roadless Area includes extensive aspen groves, old-growth lodgepole forests and numerous isolated riparian systems. Of note, an isolated population of Southern Alligator Lizards (historically documented and recently rediscovered) exists in aspen groves along the Parker Bench trail (Inyo NFST 2603).

Adobe Hills, Huntoon Creek, South Hunton Creek, Pizona, and Truman Meadows
As visitors to this remote area of the Forest know, the Excelsior Inventoried Roadless Area lives up to its name. An amazingly wild, untouched chunk of the western Great Basin, this area contains extensive pinyon-juniper woods, isolated ephemeral lakes, dune systems, and locally limited but ecologically critical springs and associated riparian systems. When taken together with the contiguous inventoried roadless areas on the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest east of the CA-NV line, this roadless complex contains over 200,000 acres of primeval public lands rich in Native American and settlement area history. The Excelsior area, especially when viewed at the landscape level with the adjacent roadless areas in Nevada, offers solitude, primitive recreation, habitat connectivity, and ecosystem representation in the wilderness preservation system.

Dexter Canyon
Dexter Canyon is perhaps the most geographically varied and ecologically rich roadless area on the north zone of the Inyo National Forest. A landscape of rough-hewn granite knobs, rolling uplands, and flat volcanic mesas deeply incised with steep-walled canyons reminiscent of the desert southwest, Dexter is unlike anywhere on the Forest. The western portion supports old-growth lodgepole and Jeffrey pine forests dotted with sedge/rush-dominated meadows (Crooked Meadow, Dead Horse Meadow, Sagehen Meadow Sentinel Meadow, Johnny Meadow), while the northern and eastern portion are defined by open sagebrush plains, extensive snowbank aspen groves, and narrow riparian aspen filled canyons. Free-flowing North Canyon Creek, Dexter Canyon Creek, Wild Cow Creek, and Wet Canyon Creeks support locally-limited but ecologically critical riparian habitat. Goshawk, greater sage grouse, black-backed woodpeckers, willow flycatchers, and nesting golden eagles join badgers, abundant mule deer, and brook trout as wild citizens of this area. Scattered across the area are abundant upland snowbank aspen groves. Isolated from any surface water source, these groves are distinct from riparian aspen.
Extensive groves exist on northeast facing slopes east of Sagehen Peak and Dead Horse Meadow, as well as the walls of upper Dexter Canyon east of Crooked Meadows.

The current boundary presented in alternative C improperly excludes the southwestern corner of the roadless area. This area contains a set of two parallel, 500-foot-deep canyons supporting a unique mix of conifers and flowing streams (Dexter and Wet Canyon creeks). From the bottom of these canyons, one would be hard pressed to describe the surrounding aspen groves and sheer volcanic walls as anything but wilderness. This southwest portion is not only the wildest and wettest portion of the roadless area, but it also has the highest ecological value and provides outstanding opportunities for primitive recreation.

**Glass Mountain**
Unique for the Eastern Sierra, the Glass Mountains form a transverse highland. Unlike most ranges in the Eastern Sierra, the Glass Mountains run east-west, connecting the Sierra Nevada biogeographic province to the Great Basin. Inclusion of a portion of this large roadless landscape would fill a current wilderness gap geographically, biologically, and recreationally in the heart of the Inyo National Forest. At this polygon’s core, the 2,041-acre Sentinel Meadow RNA is already closed to motorized use and is surrounded by inaccessible, heavily forested sheer slopes. We know of no sagebrush within this limber pine RNA and the polygon boundary should be extended to include the entire RNA.

**Piper Mountain Additions**
These two potential additions are contiguous to the existing Piper Mountains Wilderness managed by the Bureau of Land Management and offer unique opportunities to conserve an east-west corridor for species moving from the Mojave to the Sierra. This opportunity to safeguard habitat connectivity and include under-represented ecosystems, such as blackbrush and xeric shrubland, in the wilderness preservation system is extremely important in this era of drought and environmental stress, as species will be moving and adapting as conditions and habitats change.

This area has high ecological integrity with few alterations to natural conditions. The combination of alkali flats (an under-represented ecosystem type) and old growth pinyon-juniper is a unique feature of this area worthy of protection as recommended wilderness. Other significant species found in this area include Little Cutleaf, Mojave Fishhook Cactus, Compact Fleabane, Inyo Milkvetch, Pinyon Beardtongue, and Inyo Onion. The area is also known for its exceptional prehistoric cultural resources.

**Deep Springs North**
This area encompasses a significant portion of the congressionally designated Ancient Bristlecone Pine Forest. Birch Creek is a lush riparian corridor at the boundary of the Mojave and Great Basin deserts. Its rich birch-cottonwood riparian forests host a recently discovered isolated population of black toad, a California Protected Species. In addition to the Ancient Bristlecone Pine Forest, there is extensive pinyon-juniper forest and transitional desert habitat from saltbrush scrub to sagebrush steppe.
Soldier Canyon
Straddling the low gap between the highlands of the White Mountains to the north and the Inyo Mountains to the south, the Soldier Canyon roadless area presents a unique designation opportunity to conserve both an east-west corridor for species moving from the Mojave to the Sierra, and also a north-south bridge connecting the Whites and Inyos. The area’s topography is varied (steep to gentle slopes) and this terrain as well as the area’s canyons provides excellent opportunities for solitude. Recreation opportunities include backcountry activities such as hiking, horseback riding, hunting, wildlife observation, photography, spring wildflower observation, and cultural/historical resource exploration. Ecosystem types include pinyon-juniper, sagebrush, xeric shrublands, and blackbrush, which are not well represented in designated wilderness on the Inyo National Forest. Significant species found in this area include Mojave Fishhook Cactus and Little Cutleaf.

Deadman Canyon
This area is located between the White Mountains and Inyo Mountains, north of Eureka Valley Road and south of the boundary between the White Mountain and Mount Whitney Ranger Districts. Ecosystem types include pinyon-juniper, sagebrush, xeric shrublands, and blackbrush, which are habitats that are under-represented in wilderness on the Inyo National Forest. The topography includes steep to gentle slopes and offers opportunities for solitude and a wilderness quality experience. The pinyon-juniper woodlands and subalpine areas offer popular primitive recreation opportunities including hiking, horseback riding, and deer hunting.

Inyo Mountain Addition
A portion of this proposed addition is contiguous with the Inyo Mountain Wilderness, enhancing the existing wilderness and provide additional habitat connectivity and protection. Ecosystem types include pinyon-juniper, sagebrush, subalpine forest, xeric shrublands, and blackbrush, which are currently under-represented in wilderness on the Inyo National Forest. The topography includes canyons, including the scenic and geologically unique Marble Canyon, extremely rugged terrain, and high elevation plateaus with steep to gentle slopes along the eastern side. The area offers opportunities for solitude and quiet recreation. Significant species found in this area include Townsend’s Big-eared Bat, Pinyon Beardtongue, Inyo Milkvetch, Pinyon Rockcress, Mohave Fishhook Cactus, and Bristlecone Pines.

South Sierra East Addition
Encompassing the transition zone from the Mojave Desert up to the Sierra, this addition would add wilderness quality lands along the steep sierra escarpment. The area contains outstanding scenic variety and ecological diversity – from Joshua trees and creosote bush to alpine sierra. The area is contiguous with both the South Sierra Wilderness and the Sacatar Trail Wilderness to the south and presents an outstanding and conflict free addition to the National Wilderness Preservation System.
October 30, 2014

USDA Forest Service
Pacific Southwest Region
123 Club Drive
Vallejo, CA 9459

Via electronic mail

Re: Comments on Ch. 70 wilderness evaluation process for Sierra, Sequoia, and Inyo National Forests

Dear Forest Supervisors & Regional Forester:

These comments are submitted on behalf of The Wilderness Society and the conservation organizations listed below. Thank you for meeting with representatives from our organizations at the Forest Plan Alternative Development Workshop last week. This letter follows up on some of our discussions from the workshop and raises other concerns about the ongoing wilderness evaluation process. We know that you are under a tight timeframe, so wanted to get you these comments expeditiously.

SFL et al. Comments on the DEIS for draft forest plans on the Inyo, Sequoia, and Sierra national forests (August 25, 2016)
As you know, pursuant to the 2012 Planning Rule, 36 C.F.R. § 219.7(c)(2)(v), and as part of their Forest Plan revisions, the Sierra, Sequoia, and Inyo National Forests are in the process of identifying and evaluating lands that may be suitable for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS). Under the proposed Forest Service Handbook 1909.12 (FSH), Chapter 70, this involves a four-step process: (1) inventory of all lands that maybe suitable for inclusion in the NWPS; (2) evaluation of the wilderness characteristics of each inventoried area using the criteria in section 2(c) of the Wilderness Act of 1964; (3) analysis of some or all of the evaluated areas in the applicable National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) document; and (4) a decision on which areas to recommend for inclusion in the NWPS. The Forest Service recently completed the inventory step and is now evaluating the wilderness characteristics of the inventoried areas.¹

We have identified several significant flaws in the Forest Service’s ongoing evaluation process. First, as we highlighted at the workshop, the agency should provide an opportunity for meaningful public participation in the evaluation process by releasing the evaluation report for comment prior to the formulation of alternatives and publication of the draft environmental impact statement (DEIS). Second, the agency improperly excluded from detailed evaluation inventoried areas with authorized motorized trails. And finally, the agency’s “Wilderness Evaluation Narrative Outline” is problematic in a number of respects. These concerns are addressed in detail below.


At the workshop last week, we discussed our concern with the sequence and timing of the Forest Service’s wilderness evaluation, formulation of alternatives, and decisions about which areas to carry forward for analysis in the DEIS.

According to the agency process document, the Forest Service plans to:

Prepare a document of the evaluation of areas that may be suitable for inclusion in the NWPS, and include the following:

a. A description of the identification, inventory and evaluation process.
b. Narrative descriptions of each area evaluated.
c. A summary of the wilderness character for each area evaluated.
d. Large scape maps of the evaluated areas.²

¹ According to a process document on the Forest Service’s “Wilderness Inventory and Evaluation” webpage, the agency is following the draft, FACA-edited version of the revised FSH. USDA, Forest Service, Pacific Southwest Region, “Wilderness Inventory and Evaluation Process for Forest Plan Revision” (June 6, 2014),
² See supra n.1.
That information will then be included as an appendix to the DEIS and “will be available for public review during the DEIS comment period.” This approach is problematic because it excludes meaningful public participation until the DEIS stage – after the evaluation is complete and the agency has determined which areas to carry forward for NEPA analysis. See FSH 1909.12, § 73. The FSH requires the agency to “ensure that the process for inventory and evaluation is transparent and accessible to the public for input and feedback” and make documentation of the evaluation “available for public participation opportunities.” FSH 1909.12, § 72.2. Importantly, the FSH then requires the responsible official to identify which areas to carry forward in the NEPA process “[b]ased on the evaluation and input from the public participation opportunities.” FSH 1909.12, § 73 (emphasis added). The agency’s planned approach here flips that sequence on its head and is contrary to the clear direction in the FSH.

The Forest Service should make public the evaluation report as soon as it is complete and provide an opportunity for public comment and participation prior to development of alternatives and the decision about which areas to carry forward for NEPA analysis. This approach will satisfy the guidance provided in the FSH and ensure that any problems with the agency’s evaluation are identified before they are carried over into the NEPA process.

This additional opportunity for public input is particularly important following the extremely truncated and inadequate comment period on the wilderness inventory and evaluation. In contrast to 45- and 90-day comment periods for other pilot forests, the agency here provided less than 3 weeks from the time it made its final inventory data available, and denied the conservation groups’ reasonable request for a short, 5-day extension.3

II. The Forest Service Applied an Improper Initial Screen to Exclude from Detailed Evaluation Approximately 19% of Inventoried Areas that Contain Motorized Uses on Authorized Trails.

Proposed Chapter 70 of the FSH provides detailed guidance to the Forest Service on how to identify and evaluate wilderness-quality lands. First, the agency must inventory and identify “all lands that may be suitable for inclusion in the NWPS.” FSH 1909.12, § 71.1 (emphasis added). Notably, the inventory must include areas with motorized uses on certain types of forest roads or routes. FSH 1909.12, § 71.22a. Next, the agency must “comprehensively evaluate . . . the wilderness characteristics of each area identified during the inventory process” using the criteria in section 2(c) of the Wilderness Act. FSH 1909.12, § 72 (emphasis added).4

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3 See Frances Hunt, Sierra Club, et al., letter to Randy Moore, Regional Forester (Sept. 22, 2014) (request for extension) (attached).

4 That criteria includes: (1) “the degree to which the area generally appears to be affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprints of man’s work substantially unnoticeable (naturalness);” (2) “the degree to which the area has outstanding opportunities for solitude or for a primitive and unconfined type of recreation;” (3) “how an area less than 5,000 acres is of sufficient size as to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition;” and (4) “the degree to which the area may also contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value.” FSH 1909.12, § 72.1; accord 16 U.S.C. § 1131(c).
In this case, however, the Forest Service excluded approximately 19% of the inventoried areas from detailed evaluation solely because those areas contain motorized uses on authorized trails. The agency provides the following explanation on its “Wilderness Inventory and Evaluation” webpage:

As a first step in the evaluation process, we identified authorized motorized trails on the final inventory maps. Areas with authorized motorized trails were examined and determined to lack wilderness character due to the prevalence of motorized activity and its impacts to the surrounding area. Additionally, there is a high level of commitment to maintaining these authorized motorized trails. As a result, each forest’s interdisciplinary team (IDT) identified areas within the inventory where wilderness character is impacted by the motorized trail system and highlighted these portions of the inventory (about 19%). Each area will be evaluated as a whole, but the focus for the detailed evaluation will be on the portions of the inventory that do not contain motorized trails (remaining 81%).

This approach is contrary to the FSH, which clearly directs the agency to comprehensively evaluate each area identified during the inventory process. The purpose of the evaluation is to apply the criteria enumerated in section 2(c) of the Wilderness Act – through a transparent and publicly accessible process – to determine which of the inventoried areas may be suitable for inclusion in the NWPS. See FSH 1909.12, § 72. The agency is not permitted to short-circuit that process by modifying its inventory to exclude nearly 1/5 of the inventoried areas from detailed evaluation.

Moreover, the presence of authorized motorized activity in an area does not necessarily impede its wilderness character. For example, the Sequoia National Forest eliminated much of polygons 1387 (Rincon, or Golden Trout Additions) and 1394 (Woodpecker, or Domeland Additions), and the Sierra National Forest eliminated large portions of polygon 821 (Mounta Raymond), despite the fact that only a very small number of authorized motorcycle tracks cross these roadless areas. The evaluation process is designed, in part, to assess how those existing uses may affect the areas’ wilderness characteristics, including apparent naturalness or opportunities for solitude. See 16 U.S.C. § 1131(c)(1)-(2); FSH 1909.12, § 72.1(1)-(2). In fact, Congress, the Forest Service, and other agencies have routinely determined that areas with authorized motorized activity possess wilderness characteristics and

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5 USDA, Forest Service, Pacific Southwest Region, “Wilderness Inventory and Evaluation,” http://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/r5/landmanagement/planning/?cid=STELPRD3803608 (last visited October 16, 2014); see also process document, supra n.1 (describing “early evaluation step” of identifying authorized motorized trails and recommending which inventoried areas, or portions of areas, with those trails to carry forward for evaluation).

6 Even if the agency appropriately determines during the evaluation phase that authorized motorized or other uses impair wilderness characteristics, that determination should not necessarily eliminate the entire area from further consideration. In those instances, a full and fair evaluation must consider whether to close or “cherry-stem” the motorized routes (as is common throughout the NWPS), or otherwise modify the boundaries to evaluate whether the remaining portions of the area satisfy the criteria in section 2(c) of the Wilderness Act.
managed to maintain their suitability for potential inclusion in the NWPS.\textsuperscript{7} The Forest Service may not skip that assessment by making a blanket determination that areas with authorized motorized trails lack wildernesscharacter.\textsuperscript{8}

While there is no legal authority to support the Forest Service’s approach, the process document on the agency’s “Wilderness Evaluation and Inventory” webpage states that “[t]his early evaluation step is based on the criteria found in Ch. 70, 72.1(5).”\textsuperscript{9} That provision of the FSH requires the Forest Service to:

5. Evaluate the degree to which the area may be managed to preserve its wilderness characteristics. Consider such factors as:
   a. Shape and configuration of the area;
   b. Legally established rights or uses within the area;
   c. Specific Federal or state laws that may be relevant to availability of the area for wilderness or the ability to manage the area to protect wilderness characteristics;
   d. The presence and amount of non-Federal land in the area; and
   e. Management of adjacent lands.

FSH 1909.12, § 72.1(5). The process document provides no explanation of how this provision supports the agency’s “early evaluation step.” To the extent the Forest Service is suggesting that motorized trails or uses authorized under the relevant forest or travel management plan constitute “[l]egally established . . . uses within the area,” that is an erroneous interpretation of the provision. “Legally established

\textsuperscript{7} See, e.g., Public Law No. 96-550, § 103, 94 Stat. 3221 (Dec. 19, 1980) (designating six wilderness study areas in New Mexico National Forests to be managed “to maintain their presently existing wilderness character and potential for inclusion in the [NWPS]: Provided, that . . . current levels of motorized . . . uses . . . shall be permitted to continue subject to . . . reasonable rules and regulations”); Payette National Forest, Land and Resource Management Plan, ROD-9, III-74, III-82 (2003), available at http://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/payette/landmanagement/planning/?cid=stelprdb5035589 (recommending over 200,000 acres for wilderness designation and permitting existing motorized uses to continue in those areas unless it degrades wilderness values or causes resource damage or user conflicts); Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Manual 6320.06(A)(2)(d)(v) (BLM-identified Lands with Wilderness Characteristics may include motorized uses on designated routes); BLM, Little Snake Field Office, Record of Decision and Approved Resources Management Plan at 33 (Oct. 2011), available at http://www.blm.gov/pgdata/etc/medialib/blm/co/field_offices/little_snake_field/rmp_revision/rod.Par.83246.File.dat/01_LS-ROD_Approved-RMP.pdf (motorized activity permitted on designated roads and trails within Lands with Wilderness Characteristics).

\textsuperscript{8} To the extent the Forest Service claims it \textit{did} assess the areas’ wilderness characteristics as part of its “early evaluation step” (e.g., the agency’s “Wilderness Inventory and Evaluation” webpage claims that “[a]reas with authorized motorized trails were examined and determined to lack wilderness character due to the prevalence of motorized activity and its impacts to the surrounding area”), the agency did not document that evaluation – in contravention of the requirement that it ensure transparency and opportunity for public participation. \textit{See} FSH 1909.12, §§ 70.6, 72, 72.2. Moreover, in addition to the impacts of motorized activity on the area, any such evaluation would have to assess the other criteria in section 2(c) of the Wilderness Act and section 72.1 of the FSH, which the agency does not claim to have done.

\textsuperscript{9} \textit{See supra} n.1.
rights or uses” should be interpreted to refer to rights and uses established by law— not to agency planning or implementation decisions like designation of motorized trails in a travel management plan.

In any event, even if the Forest Service could consider the degree to which authorized motorized trails might affect the agency’s ability to manage the area to preserve its wilderness characteristics, that is a separate and distinct consideration from whether the area possesses wilderness characteristics in the first place. Detailed evaluation of an inventoried area’s wilderness characteristics – using the criteria enumerated in section 2(c) of the Wilderness Act and subsections 72.1(1)-(4) of the FSH – is a necessary precursor to the management considerations articulated in subsection 72.1(5). Subsection 72.1(5) does not permit the Forest Service to skip the previous four subsections, as it did here.

In sum, there is no support for the Forest Service’s initial screen used to eliminate from detailed evaluation areas with authorized motorized trails. The agency must comprehensively evaluate 100% of the inventoried areas for their wilderness characteristics – not just the 81% that do not contain authorized motorized trails.

III. The Forest Service’s “Wilderness Evaluation Narrative Outline” Suffers from Numerous Infirmities.

According to the Forest Service’s process document on its “Wilderness Inventory and Evaluation” webpage, the agency will evaluate each inventoried area “in narrative format using a wilderness evaluation template.” Presumably, the document entitled “Wilderness Evaluation Narrative Outline,” transmitted to us by the agency, will serve as that template. That document provides: “[f]or each area identified and inventoried as outlined and documented in section 71, evaluate its potential suitability for inclusion in the NWPS using criteria included in the Wilderness Act of 1964, section 2(c), as follows: . . .” The outline that follows is a lengthy matrix of questions, considerations, and factors that generally track the criteria enumerated in section 2(c) of the Wilderness Act and section 72.1 of the FSH. However, as described below, certain of the questions, considerations, and factors are arbitrary or contrary to law, and we have concerns about how they will be applied to consistently and fairly evaluate the inventoried areas’ wilderness characteristics.

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10 Such legally established rights or uses might include, for example, rights of access to private land inholdings, see Federal Land Policy & Management Act of 1976, Title V, 16 U.S.C. §§ 1761-1770; mining on patented or unpatented hard rock mining claims, see General Mining Law of 1872, 30 U.S.C. §§ 22, 26; ski area operations pursuant to special use permit, see National Forest Ski Area Permit Act of 1986, 16 U.S.C. § 497b; or American Indian treaty rights, see, e.g., Minnesota v. Mille Lacs Band of Chippewa Indians, 526 U.S. 172, 177, 193-95, 202 (1999) (affirming tribal hunting, fishing, and gathering rights established by treaty).

11 As with the evaluation process, the agency should consider whether any management concerns can be avoided through boundary adjustment. See supra n.5.

12 See supra n.1.
A. It is unclear how the agency will utilize the outline to evaluate wilderness characteristics.

As an initial matter, it is unclear how the Forest Service will utilize this lengthy matrix to evaluate the inventoried areas’ wilderness characteristics. Pursuant to the FSH, the agency’s evaluation process must be transparent and provide opportunities for public participation. See FSH 1909.12, §§ 70.6, 72, 72.2. The agency should clarify how it intends to balance and consider the numerous inputs in the outline in its evaluation of the inventoried areas and subsequent decision of which areas to carry forward for analysis in the relevant NEPA document. See FSH 1909.12, §§ 72-73.

Our concerns about how, exactly, the matrix will be used are grounded in past agency practice of improperly evaluating an area’s wilderness character. For example, the Forest Service has often conflated the criterion that an area has “outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation.” 16 U.S.C. § 1131(c)(2) (emphasis added). As the plain language of the Wilderness Act and the FSH make clear, this is an either/or criterion: “an area only has to possess one or the other,” and “does not have to possess outstanding opportunities for both elements.” FSH 1909.12, § 72.1(2). Accordingly, the agency’s evaluation must consider the section of the outline addressing the degree to which the area has outstanding opportunities for solitude separately from the section of the outline addressing the degree to which the area has outstanding opportunities for a primitive and unconfined type of recreation. That means that the Forest Service cannot, for example, aggregate, average, or otherwise conflate those sections of the outline in its evaluation of the inventoried areas.

B. The outline improperly omits the “outstanding opportunities for . . . a primitive and unconfined type of recreation” criterion for evaluating wilderness characteristics.

Pursuant to section 2(c)(2) of the Wilderness Act and section 72.1(c)(2) of the FSH, section 2 of the outline provides that the Forest Service must “[e]valuate the degree to which the area has outstanding opportunities for solitude or for [a] primitive and unconfined type of recreation.” The outline omits, however, subsection 2.a – which presumably would address the primitive and unconfined recreation criterion – and instead skips right to subsection 2.b addressing the solitude criterion. We assume this is an inadvertent error in the version of the spreadsheet transmitted to us, but wanted to bring it to the agency’s attention.

C. The outline improperly evaluates apparent naturalness.

Pursuant to section 2(c) of the Wilderness Act, the Forest Service must evaluate whether the inventoried areas “generally appear[] to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man’s work substantially unnoticeable.” 16 U.S.C. § 1131(c)(1) (emphasis added); accord FSH 1909.12, § 72.1(1) (repeating language). Based on the plain meaning of this language, it has long been understood that this criterion refers to the area’s “apparent naturalness,” and not its ecological naturalness or integrity. In other words, the proper inquiry is whether the area generally appears natural to the average, reasonable visitor who is not familiar with the area’s historical or ecological

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13 See also infra Section II.B (the section of the outline addressing the primitive and unconfined recreation criterion is missing).
conditions. Other agencies, including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and the BLM, use this interpretation.

As explained by two scholars, “[n]atural and wild conditions are not automatically recognized and appreciated by [wilderness] visitors during their experiences.” Chad P. Dawson & John C. Hendee, Wilderness Management: Stewardship and Protection of Resources and Values at 452 (4th ed. 2009) (excerpt attached). For example, “[m]ost visitors will not recognize unnatural successional changes, such as meadows invaded by trees or aspen being replaced by spruce, as a result of wildfire prevention and control.” Id. In fact, “[t]ruly natural conditions may not facilitate the degree of wildlife or scenic visibility most visitors desire. For example, timber harvest areas may improve visibility and concentrate wildlife more than dense forests.” Id.

To satisfy the “naturalness” criterion, FWS guidance explains that “it must be possible to observe the area as being generally natural. FWS Manual, pt. 610, § 4.9, available at http://www.fws.gov/policy/610fw4.html. The Manual further explains:

A. We make a distinction between an area’s “apparent naturalness” and “historic conditions” in the context of biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health. The term “historic conditions” refers to the condition of the landscape in a particular area before the onset of significant, human-caused change. The term “apparent naturalness” refers to whether or not an area looks natural to the average visitor who is not familiar with historic conditions versus human-affected ecosystems in a given area. . . .

B. We avoid an approach to assessing naturalness that limits wilderness designation only to those areas judged pristine. Land that was once logged, used for agriculture, or otherwise significantly altered by humans may be eligible for wilderness designation if it has been restored or is in the process of being restored to a substantially natural appearance.


With respect to evaluating an area’s naturalness, BLM’s Manual for Conducting Wilderness Characteristics Inventory directs the agency first to “[d]etermine if the area appears to be in a natural condition. [] The Area must appear to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, and any work of human beings must be substantially unnoticeable.” BLM Manual 6310.06(C)(2)(b)(i), available at http://www.blm.gov/pgdata/etc/medialib/blm/wo/Information_Resources_Management/policy/blm_manual.Par.38337.File.dat/6310.pdf. Next, BLM must “[d]ocument noticeable human impacts within the area,” and, “[i]f several minor impacts exist, summarize their cumulative effect on the area’s degree of apparent naturalness.” BLM Manual 6310.06(C)(2)(b)(ii). The Manual provides detailed guidance on how to assess apparent naturalness:

1) The review of human impacts will assess the presence or absence of apparent naturalness (i.e., do the works of humans appear to be substantially unnoticeable to the average visitor?). There is a difference between an area’s natural integrity and its apparent naturalness as explained below.
   a) Natural integrity refers to the presence or absence of ecosystems that are relatively unaffected by modern human activities.
   b) Apparent naturalness refers to whether or not an area looks natural to the average visitor who is not familiar with the biological composition of natural ecosystems versus human-affected ecosystems.

2) Caution should be used in assessing the effect of relatively minor human impacts on naturalness. Some human works are acceptable so long as they are substantially unnoticeable. Avoid an overly strict approach to assessing naturalness. . . .

In evaluating apparent naturalness, however, the Forest Service’s outline includes a series of questions that directly address the inventoried areas’ ecological integrity:

1.b.i Does the area have ecological integrity?
   1.b.i.1 Is species composition/succession generally the result of natural processes or have they been manipulated by humans?
1.b.ii What are the hydrologic conditions of the area?
1.b.iii What is the air quality of the area?
1.b.iv What are the soil conditions of the area?
1.b.v What is the condition of meadow and riparian areas within the area?

These measures of ecological integrity may be relevant to whether the area “also contain[s] ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical values.” 16 U.S.C. § 1131(c)(4). But they are not proper considerations with respect to the area’s apparent naturalness.

This issue could be remedied, however, by shifting the focus of the inquiry. For example, while “air quality” or “soil conditions” is not a proper measure of an area’s naturalness, the appearance of the area’s air or soil resources to the average visitor unfamiliar with historic or ecological conditions is a proper consideration. If the air appears smoggy or polluted or the soil appears heavily eroded or compacted to the average visitor, the area may not satisfy the naturalness criterion.

The naturalness section of the outline includes other considerations that are not tailored to the relevant inquiry. In particular, the outline includes a series of questions about the existence of past or current human activities or improvements (e.g., vegetation management, grazing, fish stocking, logging, etc.). The relevant inquiry, however, is not the presence of these activities, but rather their effect on the area’s apparent naturalness. As with considerations like air quality or soil conditions, if past or current human activities or improvements have impacted the area such that it no longer appears natural to the average visitor unfamiliar with the area prior to those activities or improvements, then the area may not satisfy the naturalness criterion. The mere presence of those human activities or improvements, however, is not dispositive. For example, a decades-old timber harvest with re-vegetation occurring is often unnoticeable to the average visitor. Accordingly, the agency should revise this portion of its outline to consider whether the area appears natural in spite of human activities or improvements that may be present.

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17 See also FSH 1909.12, § 72.1(4) (making clear that “[t]hese values are not required to be present in an area for the area to be recommended for inclusion in the NWPS, but their presence should be identified and evaluated where they exist”).

18 Certain questions in the outline are focused on the proper inquiry, such as “what [e]ffects do [particular improvements] have to the naturalness of the surrounding area” or “[a]re [those improvements] substantially noticeable.” See, e.g., §§ 1.c.i – 1.c.iii, 1.c.v – 1.c.vi, 1.c.x. Many others, however, are not. See, e.g., §§ 1.a.i.3 – 1.a.i.4, 1.a.ii.3, 1.c.iv, 1.c.vii – 1.c.ix, 1.c.xii.
In sum, the Forest Service should revise the naturalness section of its outline to properly evaluate the inventoried areas’ apparent naturalness, as opposed to their historical condition or ecological integrity.

D. The outline improperly considers sights, sounds, and activities outside the inventoried areas.

With respect to the inventoried areas’ outstanding opportunities for solitude, subsection 2.b.v of the outline asks whether “sights and sounds from outside the area are present.” Similarly, subsection 1.c.xi asks whether there are “developments or activities immediately adjacent to the area” that affect its naturalness. As explained in detail at pages 11-13 of Sierra Forest Legacy et al.'s “Comments on Notice of Intent and Detailed Proposed Action for the Forest Plan Revisions on the Inyo, Sequoia and Sierra National Forests,” outside sights, sounds, or activities are not proper considerations in evaluating an area’s wilderness characteristics. The relevant section of those comments is attached and incorporated herein by reference.

E. The outline’s consideration of other designations is not a criterion for evaluating wilderness characteristics.

Finally, section 5 of the outline considers “the degree to which the area may be managed to preserve its wilderness characteristics.” Subsections 5.a through 5.e generally track the factors enumerated in section 72.1(5) of the FSH (shape and configuration of the area, legally established rights or uses, relevant federal or state laws, non-federal lands, and management of adjacent lands). Subsection 5.f, however, asks whether there are “any other designations overlying the area,” including Wild and Scenic Rivers, Pacific Crest Trail or other designated trail segments, National Monuments, National Recreation Areas, Special Management Areas, or Research Natural Areas. With respect to each of these designations, the outline asks whether there are “provisions of the designation that could potentially affect wilderness character or the ability to manage and protect wilderness” and whether “multiple designations could enhance the wilderness protections.”

These “other designation” considerations are not grounded in section 2(c) the Wilderness Act or the FSH, and the Forest Service should make clear how it intends to apply them in its evaluation. For example, the existence of a Wild and Scenic River or Pacific Crest Trail segment might be relevant to an area’s outstanding opportunities for a primitive and unconfined type of recreation. It would be improper, however, for the agency to rely on other designations as a substitute for recommended wilderness protection.

IV. Conclusion

Thank you for your attention to these issues. Please include these comments in the administrative record for the forest plans. If you have questions about these comments or would like to discuss them in more detail, please contact Alison Flint (alison_flint@tws.org; 303-802-1404).
We look forward to ongoing engagement with the Forest Service as it completes the wilderness evaluation process and determines which areas to carry forward for further NEPA analysis and potential recommendation for inclusion in the NWPS.

Sincerely,

Alison Flint  
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The Wilderness Society  
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Range of Light Group (Toiyabe Chapter), Sierra Club  
Mammoth Lakes, CA

Frances A. Hunt  
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Greg Suba  
Conservation Director  
California Native Plant Society  
Sacramento, CA
June 3, 2015

Randy Moore, Regional Forester
USDA Forest Service, Pacific Southwest Region
1323 Club Drive
Vallejo, CA 9459

Via electronic mail

Re: Ch. 70 wilderness evaluation for Sierra, Sequoia, and Inyo National Forests

Dear Regional Forester and Forest Supervisors:

SFL et al. Comments on the DEIS for draft forest plans on the Inyo, Sequoia, and Sierra national forests (August 25, 2016)
This letter addresses our major concerns with the recent release of the areas the Sierra, Sequoia, and Inyo National Forests intend to carry forward for analysis as potential recommended wilderness in the upcoming draft environmental impact statement (DEIS). Those 10 areas total only about 121,000 acres, or just over 8% of the acreage identified in the forests’ final 1.4-million-acre wilderness inventory. In a May 19 conversation, Director of Ecosystem Planning Al Olson confirmed that the forests are crafting alternatives that include only those ten areas. Presumably then, the amount of recommended wilderness analyzed in the DEIS alternatives will range from 0 to 8% of the inventoried acreage.

This approach is contrary to the letter and spirit of the Chapter 70 directives and almost certainly guarantees that the DEIS range of alternatives will violate NEPA. To correct these deficiencies and avoid future litigation, the agency must: (1) permit meaningful public input on the methodology and results of its wilderness evaluation prior to formulating its DEIS alternatives, and (2) reconsider which areas to carry forward for analysis in the DEIS to ensure a range of reasonable alternatives. These requirements and recommendations are explained in more detail below.

I. Chapter 70 requires the Forest Service to provide an opportunity for public input on the evaluation methodology and results prior to a determination of which areas to carry forward for NEPA analysis.¹

Chapter 70 of the Forest Service Handbook 1909.12 sets out a four-step process for the agency to satisfy its obligation to “[i]dentify and evaluate lands that may be suitable for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System [NWPS] and determine whether to recommend any such lands for wilderness designation” through a plan revision.² The agency must: (1) inventory all lands that may be suitable for inclusion in the NWPS; (2) evaluate the wilderness characteristics of each inventoried area using the criteria in section 2(c) of the Wilderness Act of 1964; (3) analyze some or all of the evaluated areas in the applicable NEPA document; and (4) decide which areas to recommend for inclusion in the NWPS. Chapter 70 requires the agency to provide opportunities for public engagement at each of the four steps:

- Early and during each step of the process identified in this chapter, the Responsible Official:
  1. Shall provide opportunities for public participation and collaboration . . . . Through such opportunities, engage the public . . . early and throughout the process to provide feedback on the inventory, evaluation, analysis, and recommendation steps identified in this chapter.
  2. May provide additional participation opportunities specifically on this topic as necessary.

¹ We articulated these same concerns about the lack of public involvement and transparency in the wilderness evaluation in an October 30, 2014 letter (attached).
² 36 C.F.R. § 219.7(c)(2)(v).
Maps, analysis, and other documentation developed through each step of the process must be made available timely to the public to increase transparency and enable feedback and input.\(^3\)

With respect to the evaluation step in particular, section 72 of the directives reiterates the requirement to “provide opportunities for public . . . participation” and “communicate the evaluation process to the public.”\(^4\) The agency must “ensure that the process for inventory and evaluation is transparent and accessible to the public for input and feedback” and make documentation of the evaluation “available for participation opportunities.”\(^5\) Once the evaluation phase (including public participation) is complete, Chapter 70 then requires the responsible official to identify which areas to carry forward for analysis in the NEPA process “based on the evaluation and input from the public participation opportunities.”\(^6\)

The Sierra, Sequoia, and Inyo National Forests have thus far failed to make available to the public their wilderness evaluation methodology or results, and there has been limited opportunity for public involvement at the evaluation stage.\(^7\) Yet the forests have already determined which areas to carry forward for analysis in the NEPA process. By completing the third step in the Chapter 70 process prior to providing a meaningful opportunity for public participation on the evaluation methodology or results, the agency has circumvented the letter and intent of the Chapter 70 directives. Absent public input on the evaluation methodology and results prior to alternative development and determination of which areas to carry forward for analysis, the agency has foreclosed any opportunity for meaningful public involvement, including the chance to identify problems with the evaluation before they are carried over into the NEPA process.\(^8\) Under this approach, it is not possible for the responsible official to identify which areas to carry forward for NEPA analysis “based on the evaluation and input from the public participation opportunities,” as required by Chapter 70.\(^9\) More generally, releasing those areas that will be carried forward for analysis prior to disclosing information about the evaluation methodology or results is contrary to the directive to “ensure that the process . . . is transparent and accessible to the public for input and feedback.”\(^10\)

\(^3\) FSH 1909.12, ch. 70, § 70.61 (emphasis added).
\(^4\) Id. § 72.
\(^5\) Id. § 72.2.
\(^6\) Id. § 73 (emphasis added).
\(^7\) The Inyo National Forest (INF) has scheduled an open house on June 9th to brief the public on the potential wilderness areas it is carrying forward in the planning process.
\(^8\) For example, the limited information available on the agency’s wilderness inventory and evaluation webpage shows that the Forest Service applied an improper initial evaluation screen to exclude from detailed evaluation approximately 19% of inventoried areas that contain motorized uses on authorized trails. Chapter 70 requires the agency to “comprehensively evaluate . . . the wilderness characteristics of each area identified during the inventory process” using the criteria in section 2(c) of the Wilderness Act. Id. § 72 (emphasis added). As we explained in more detail in our October 30, 2014 letter, the presence of authorized motorized activity in an area does not necessarily impede its wilderness character, and the evaluation process is designed, in part, to assess how those existing uses may affect the areas’ wilderness characteristics.
\(^9\) Id. § 73.
\(^10\) Id. § 72.2.
To correct these deficiencies and satisfy Chapter 70, the Sierra, Sequoia, and Inyo National Forests must make publicly available their wilderness evaluation methodology and results and provide a meaningful opportunity for public input on that information. The forests should address any problems with the evaluation identified by the public, and then reconsider which areas to carry forward for analysis in the DEIS based on the final evaluation and public input.

II. **NEPA requires the Forest Service to analyze a range of reasonable alternatives, which must consider more than 0-8% of the acreage identified in the final wilderness inventory for potential wilderness recommendation.**

The analysis of alternatives under NEPA is the “heart” of an EIS. An agency must “[r]igorously explore and objectively evaluate all reasonable alternatives” to a proposed action. Consistent with NEPA’s basic policy objective to protect the environment, this includes more environmentally protective alternatives. “The existence of a viable but unexamined alternative renders an [EIS] inadequate.” The “touchstone” of the inquiry is “whether an EIS’s selection and discussion of alternatives fosters informed decision-making and informed public participation.”

The Sierra, Sequoia, and Inyo National Forests’ determination to carry forward for analysis only 10 areas totaling approximately 121,000 acres (only about 8% of the acreage identified in the forests’ final wilderness inventory) almost certainly guarantees an unreasonably narrow range of alternatives. Presumably, the DEIS alternatives will analyze between 0 and 8% of the inventoried acreage, and the remaining 92% of those roadless lands will be off the table as potential recommended wilderness. Under binding Ninth Circuit precedent, such a narrow range of options – each of which leads to the end result that only an exceedingly small proportion of inventoried lands will be recommended for wilderness designation – violates NEPA.

In *California v. Block*, the Ninth Circuit invalidated the Forest Service’s EIS for a decision-making process to allocate RARE II inventoried roadless areas into three management categories (recommended wilderness, non-wilderness, or further planning) for purposes of first-generation forest plans. “None of the eight alternatives seriously considered by the Forest Service designate[d] more than thirty-three

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12 Id. § 1502.14(a). See also 42 U.S.C. § 4332(2)(E) (agencies must “study, develop, and describe appropriate alternatives to recommended courses of action in any proposal which involves unresolved conflicts concerning alternative uses of available resources”).
13 40 C.F.R. § 1500.2(e) (agencies must “[u]se the NEPA process to identify and assess reasonable alternatives to proposed actions that will avoid or minimize adverse effects of these actions upon the quality of the human environment”). See also, e.g., *Kootenai Tribe of Idaho v. Veneman*, 313 F.3d 1094, 1121-22 (9th Cir. 2002) (citing cases), *abrogated on other grounds by The Wilderness Soc’y v. U.S. Forest Serv.*, 630 F.3d 1173, 1178-80 (9th Cir. 2011) (en banc).
14 *Mont. Wilderness Ass’n v. Connell*, 725 F.3d 988, 1004 (9th Cir. 2013) (quotations and citation omitted).
15 Id. at 1005 (quotations and citation omitted).
16 The forests may have determined in the evaluation that some proportion of that remaining 92% lack the requisite wilderness characteristics, as defined by section 2(c) of the Wilderness Act. But without the methodology or results of the evaluation, the public has no way of knowing what that proportion is and if the determination that those areas lack wilderness character is reasonable.
percent of the roadless acreage to Wilderness, and none designate[d] less than thirty-seven percent of that acreage to Nonwilderness.” The Court held that such a narrow range of alternatives violated NEPA because it “uncritically assume[d] that a substantial portion of the RARE II areas should be developed and consider[ed] only those alternatives with that end result.” The same will be true of the alternatives analyzed in the DEIS for the Sierra, Sequoia, and Inyo, should those forests proceed with analyzing a maximum of 8% of the inventoried acreage for potential wilderness recommendation. Notably, the Ninth Circuit in Block invalidated as unduly narrow a range of alternatives that would have considered a maximum of over four times the proportion of potential recommended wilderness that the Sierra, Sequoia, and Inyo National Forests intend to analyze in the DEIS (33% vs. 8%).

The anticipated range of alternatives for the upcoming DEIS is particularly concerning given the apparent determination – without any public involvement or transparency – to exclude from NEPA analysis significant acreage with important wilderness values and characteristics. For example, the DEIS apparently will not consider the Devil’s Gulch area bordering Yosemite National Park in the Sierra National Forest, or the Bright Star area in the Sequoia National Forest. Both of these areas were included in Senator Boxer’s state-wide wilderness bills and garnered significant local support. Devil’s Gulch, which includes the steep slopes that rise up from the banks of the Wild South Fork Merced Wild & Scenic River, also represents a critical opportunity to preserve and protect an under-represented, low-elevation ecosystem in a region where most protected landscapes are high-elevation, alpine or sub-alpine.

Failure to consider one or more alternatives that would include these and other areas with wilderness characteristics will render the Sierra, Sequoia, and Inyo National Forests’ EIS invalid. As the Ninth Circuit in Block explained, “[w]hile nothing in NEPA prohibits the Forest Service from ultimately implementing a proposal that allocates [relatively few areas to recommended wilderness], it is troubling that the Forest Service saw fit to consider from the outset only those alternatives leading to that end result.” A range of alternatives that would analyze a maximum of only 8% of the inventoried acreage.

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17 690 F.2d 753, 765 (9th Cir. 1982).
18 Id. at 767.
19 See also, e.g., Council on Environmental Quality, NEPA’s Forty Most Asked Questions, 46 Fed. Reg. 18,026 (Mar. 23, 1981) (“When there are potentially a very large number of alternatives, only a reasonable number of examples, covering the full spectrum of alternatives, must be analyzed and compared in the EIS. An appropriate series of alternatives might include dedicating 0, 10, 30, 50, 70, 90, or 100 percent of the Forest to wilderness.”); Mont. Wilderness Ass’n, 725 F.3d at 1004-05 (range of alternatives for national monument plan that would have opened between 0 and 10 (the total number existing) backcountry airstrips, including several mid-range alternatives, was reasonable).
21 See Jeff Novak & Christina Boston, Sierra National Forest Inventory Areas, Summary of The Wilderness Society’s Data on Under-represented Ecosystems in the National Wilderness Preservation System, at 9, Unit 772 (Nov. 2014) (Forest Service narrative recognizing that over 90% of the Devil’s Gulch area is comprised of under-represented ecological types) (attached).
22 See Mont. Wilderness Ass’n, 725 F.3d at 1004 (“The existence of a viable but unexamined alternative renders an [EIS] inadequate.” (quotations and citation omitted)).
23 690 F.2d at 768.
frustrates informed decision-making and public participation. Thus, to avoid a NEPA violation, the Forest Service must reconsider which areas to carry forward for NEPA analysis to ensure a range of reasonable alternatives.

III. Conclusion

The Forest Service must take immediate action to correct course and remedy the public participation, transparency, and NEPA violations identified in this letter. First the agency must make publicly available the methodology for and results of its wilderness evaluation and provide a meaningful opportunity for public comment on that information. Second, the agency must correct any deficiencies identified in the evaluation methodology or results. Finally, the agency must reconsider which areas to carry forward for analysis in the DEIS “based on the evaluation and input from the public participation opportunities” and to ensure a range of reasonable alternatives. With the DEIS slated to be released in October, it is critical that the agency take these actions immediately to correct the identified deficiencies and avoid future litigation.

We look forward to discussing these issues further and working with the Forest Service to correct course and ensure that its wilderness evaluation and range of alternatives complies with Chapter 70 and NEPA.

Sincerely,

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Via electronic mail

Re: Ch. 70 wilderness evaluation for Sierra, Sequoia, and Inyo National Forests

Dear Regional Forester and Forest Supervisors:

As you are aware, we have major concerns with the Sierra, Sequoia, and Inyo National Forests’ wilderness evaluation and determination of areas to carry forward for analysis as potential recommended wilderness. We have repeatedly expressed those concerns via letter, through in-person
meetings, and over the phone.¹ While we appreciate the agency sharing its “Summary of the Wilderness Evaluation Process & Process for Identifying Areas for Potential Wilderness Recommendation in the NEPA Process,” the process paper only highlights the forests’ ongoing failure to comply with the letter and intent of the Chapter 70 directives and to ensure a transparent, science-based, and collaborative process consistent with the requirements of the 2012 planning rule. As described in detail below, the process paper raises more questions than answers and generally confirms the forests’ failure to properly apply and implement the procedures and criteria described in the planning rule and the Chapter 70 directives. Given the imminent release of the draft environmental impact statement (DEIS), these flaws will almost certainly be carried over into the NEPA process for the plan revision.

To correct the serious deficiencies identified in this and our previous letters, the agency must: (a) release both the methodology for and results of the wilderness evaluation for public review and comment;² (b) correct any identified deficiencies with the evaluation; (c) then, based on the final evaluation and public input, determine which areas or portions of areas to carry forward for NEPA analysis, ensuring a range of reasonable alternatives; and (d) proceed with the DEIS analysis. However, recognizing the significant work the forests have put into the wilderness evaluation process to date and the reality that the DEIS is unlikely to be significantly delayed to accommodate these required corrective actions, we would like to propose an alternative solution: the DEIS would include in one alternative all, or the vast majority of, the inventoried areas to ensure an adequate range of alternatives, a robust analysis of the trade-offs and impacts associated with recommending most (if not all) of the inventoried areas for wilderness designation, and the breathing room to make additional changes to the evaluation in response to public comment on the DEIS.

I. Lack of transparent, repeatable, and science-based methodology

Overall, the forests’ wilderness evaluation process lacks transparency and provides no evidence that it is data-driven. This is in stark contrast to the earlier wilderness inventory, which was methodical, transparent, and repeatable. The recently released process paper asserts that “each of the three forests assembled interdisciplinary teams and conducted a thorough review of each evaluation polygon using the best available information and addressed a list of questions,” and “[a] spreadsheet was completed by the teams on each forest for each evaluation polygon and any available information relevant to the question was documented in the spreadsheet.”³ Yet the public was given no information about the composition of the interdisciplinary teams, the sources of the “best available information,” the answers to the list of questions, or the spreadsheets in which the answers were putatively documented. No data were provided that would allow a comparison among polygons. In fact, the only data that we are sure

¹ Our October 30, 2014 and June 3, 2015 letters to the regional forester and forest supervisors are attached hereto and incorporated by reference. Stan Van Velsor and Matt Dietz raised concerns in telephone conversations with Al Olson on May 19th and July 8th. We also met with Deputy Regional Forester Barnie Gyant and regional staff on June 17th to discuss our concerns. And most recently, we expressed our concerns with Regional Forester Randy Moore and regional staff on August 25th.
² We understand that the agency is planning to post the process paper (but not the evaluation narratives or other documentation of the results of the evaluation of each area) on the regional wilderness inventory and evaluation webpage and invite public comment.
³ Process Paper, § I(C).
can even be quantified are the analyses of ecosystem representation in wilderness which The Wilderness Society provided to the regional office.

Even had this information been provided to the public, the evaluation methodology would still lack repeatability. There is no indication of how the questions were answered or what types of data were used—nominal, ordinal, or rational. For example, one question from the “Evaluation of Wilderness Character” attachment reads, “Are there invasive species present? If so, please describe the situation.” Invasive species are found throughout the forests, in varying quantities. A “yes” or “no” answer to this question provides little help in determining and comparing human impacts in the polygon. Rather, the forests need to quantify the degree of invasive species impact. Yet, it is not clear whether or how the interdisciplinary team quantified the level of invasive species in the polygon. Was it nominal (species list), ordinal (high, medium, low), or rational (25% of the polygon area)? In addition, it is not clear—after all of the questions were answered—how the interdisciplinary teams quantified the information, summed the results for each polygon, and made comparisons among all of the evaluated areas. What score qualified an area to be brought forward into the DEIS analysis? Was there a threshold number that separated the polygons that were brought forward compared to those that were not? Absent specific information on how questions were answered and quantified (if at all), the evaluation process is not repeatable.

Perhaps the most alarming aspect of this process is that the forest supervisors determined which areas should be brought forward for NEPA analysis before the methods were “finalized” and the evaluations complete. If the methods have not been determined and clearly communicated, then those determinations are premature. Moreover, the vast majority of evaluated areas that the forest supervisors have determined not to carry forward into the DEIS do not yet have any accompanying narratives that provide the rationale for why they will not be brought forward. The wilderness evaluation process document clearly states that “the draft evaluation narratives provided the primary foundation for the initial identification of potential recommended wilderness areas.”4 If the narratives were the primary method for making a determination, it is unclear how areas without narratives could be judged against other polygons and dropped from analysis in the DEIS.

The forests have created the impression that decisions were made before the data were analyzed and even before a method for evaluating wilderness character was completed. This is contrary to the letter and intent of the 2012 planning rule and the Chapter 70 directives, which require a transparent process supported by the best available scientific information and with meaningful opportunities for public participation. The specific infirmities in the forests’ wilderness evaluations and determinations of areas to carry forward for analysis are discussed in more detail below.

II. Inadequate public input on the wilderness evaluation

Chapter 70 requires the agency to provide opportunities for public engagement at each of the four steps: “[e]arly and during each step of the process identified in this chapter, the Responsible Official . . .

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4 Process Paper, § II(B)(1)(a).
shall provide opportunities for public participation and collaboration.”

“Maps, analysis, and other documentation developed through each step of the process must be made available timely to the public to increase transparency and enable feedback and input.” The Sierra, Sequoia, and Inyo National Forests have yet to satisfy these requirements for the wilderness evaluation, and the forests’ recently released process paper makes clear that they will not do so. Instead, the paper confirms that the forests determined which areas to carry forward for NEPA analysis prior to providing a meaningful opportunity for public input on the evaluation process or results. Under this approach, it is not possible for the forest supervisors to identify which areas or portions of areas to carry forward for NEPA analysis “[b]ased on the evaluation and input from the public participation opportunities,” as required by Chapter 70.

Despite this fundamental flaw, the process paper identifies four public input opportunities: (1) evaluation maps and web-based “Talking Points,” (2) scoping comments; (3) reports summarizing ecosystem representation information; and (4) future DEIS Appendix. First, only the Talking Points system can reasonably be considered an opportunity for public engagement on the evaluation. And while Talking Points provided a valuable opportunity for the public to identify relevant information about particular inventoried areas, it provided no opportunity for public engagement on the agency’s process for or the results of the wilderness evaluation. Moreover, the extremely truncated and inadequate comment period (less than 3 weeks from the time the final inventory data became available) for the Talking Points system undercut its utility as a meaningful opportunity for public input.

Second, the opportunity to comment on the proposed action and notice of intent to prepare an EIS did not provide a meaningful opportunity for public input on the wilderness evaluation. The notice of intent solicited public input on “the scope of the issues to be addressed” and “significant issues related to the proposed action” – not on the wilderness evaluation. In fact, the proposed action provided no information relevant to the wilderness evaluation process other than to mention that “[t]here may be new recommendations that result from the wilderness evaluations currently underway.” The September 2014 “Fact Sheet and Frequently Asked Questions for the Wilderness Inventory and Evaluation Planning Process for the Inyo, Sequoia and Sierra National Forests” handout stated that input received through the Talking Points website would not be considered formal comments for purposes of scoping and encouraged interested parties to provide formal comments through the scoping process.

Yet the public had little opportunity to provide meaningful input on the wilderness evaluation through scoping because the Talking Points website was activated less than three weeks prior to the deadline for submitting scoping comments, making it very difficult for interested parties to cross-walk between the two processes in a reasonable timeframe.

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5 Forest Service Handbook (FSH) 1909.12, ch. 70, § 70.61 (emphasis added).
6 FSH 1909.12, ch. 70, § 70.61; see also id. § 72 (reiterating requirement to make evaluation process transparent and accessible and provide opportunities for public participation).
7 FSH 1909.12, ch. 70, § 73.
8 Process Paper, § I(E).
10 See 79 Fed. Reg. at 51,541.
Third, while we greatly appreciate the forests’ consideration of our ecosystem representation analysis—including the detailed reports summarizing the information we submitted—that cannot be considered an opportunity for public participation on the wilderness evaluation. Instead, it simply shows that the agency meaningfully considered and incorporated information that The Wilderness Society submitted unsolicited. Notably, relevant provisions in the 2012 planning rule and planning directives require the agency to incorporate ecosystem representation information into its wilderness inventory and evaluation and other elements of the plan revision process.

Fourth, inclusion of the evaluation narratives as an appendix to the DEIS and the opportunity to comment at that point does not satisfy the agency’s obligations under Chapter 70 to provide meaningful opportunity for public participation at the evaluation stage. By that point, errors in the evaluation will have been carried forward into the NEPA process and the focus will be on the forest’s analysis—the third step in the Chapter 70 process. Moreover, as we have repeatedly made clear, absent an opportunity for meaningful public input on the methodology and results of the evaluation prior to the determination of areas to carry forward for analysis, it is not possible for the responsible official to make that determination “[b]ased on the evaluation and input from public participation opportunities,” as Chapter 70 requires.11 Finally, the provision requiring that the agency document the evaluation in an appendix to the applicable NEPA document does not somehow absolve the agency of its obligation to provide opportunities for public participation “[e]arly and during each step of the [Chapter 70] process” by ensuring that “[m]aps, analysis, and other documentation developed through each step of the process [are] made available timely to the public to increase transparency and enable feedback and input.”12

The forest’s current approach of releasing its process paper and providing for public input on its methodology for the wilderness evaluation and determination of areas to carry forward for analysis is an important first step in remedying the Chapter 70 deficiencies we have identified. However, as we made clear in our June 3, 2015 letter, the agency must release both the methodology and results of the wilderness evaluation, provide meaningful opportunity for public input, fix any errors in the evaluation, and then—based on the final evaluation and public input—determine which areas to carry forward for analysis. This necessarily will require the agency to take a step back to ensure compliance with the letter and intent of the Chapter 70 directives. Unfortunately, the agency has refused to do so and instead appears to be forging ahead while attempting to backfill previous errors and arbitrary decisions.

III. NEPA range of alternatives

As we have repeatedly made clear to the agency, the forests’ current approach of carrying forward for analysis only 10 areas totaling approximately 121,000 acres (or about 8% of the acreage identified in the forests’ final wilderness inventory) almost certainly guarantees an unreasonably narrow range of alternatives in the upcoming DEIS, in violation of NEPA. We described the agency’s obligations under NEPA and binding Ninth Circuit precedent in detail in our June 3, 2015 letter. We have seen no corrective action in the intervening months, although we have been informed that the forests intend to

11 FSH 1909.12, ch. 70, § 73 (emphasis added).
12 FSH 1909.12, ch. 70, §§ 70.61, 72.2.
identify an additional 128,400 acres in the coming weeks, for a total of 249,400 acres in 27 areas that will be carried forward for analysis in one alternative (just under 18% of the inventoried acreage).\textsuperscript{13} This is consistent with the statement in the process paper of the ongoing “[i]dentification of additional areas to bring forward for NEPA analysis.”\textsuperscript{14}

Unfortunately, the additional 128,400 acres is still insufficient to ensure a range of reasonable alternatives.\textsuperscript{15} Moreover, simply adding in additional areas to insulate itself against a NEPA challenge is insufficient to remedy the issues we have identified in this and our previous letters. Rather, the forests need to take a step back and ensure that their wilderness evaluation satisfies the letter and intent of the Chapter 70 directives \textit{prior} to determining – based on the final evaluation and public input – which areas or portions of areas to carry forward for analysis and formulating corresponding NEPA alternatives.

IV. Specific comments on process paper

A. Consideration of motorized trails

As we explained in detail in our October 30, 2014 letter, the way in which the forests have considered motorized trails is improper. Chapter 70 requires the agency to evaluate “[a]ll lands included in the inventory” pursuant to the criteria in section 2(c) of the Wilderness Act: apparent naturalness; outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation; how an area less than 5,000 acres is of sufficient size to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition; and other ecological, geological, scientific, educational, scenic, or historical values.\textsuperscript{16} While the presence of motorized uses may in some instances affect one or more of these criteria, the Chapter 70 directives lend no support for elevating and evaluating that use separately from other characteristics, features, uses, and values that may enhance or diminish an area’s wilderness character. Indeed, section 72 of the directives does not even mention authorized motorized uses as a proper consideration in the wilderness evaluation.

The recently released process paper describes the forests’ consideration of motorized trails as a preliminary step in the wilderness evaluation process. First, the forests “created sub-polygons within the inventory polygons that encompass authorized motor vehicle trails.”\textsuperscript{17} The paper does not describe a methodology for creating those sub-polygons (e.g., whether entire areas were excluded; whether motorized trails were cherry-stemmed; what buffer, if any, was placed around motorized trails; whether

\textsuperscript{13} According to information provided at an August 25\textsuperscript{th} meeting with the regional forester, the DEIS alternatives will include the following acreages of recommended wilderness:
  - Alternative A (no action): 0
  - Alternative B (preferred): 37,500 (all on the Inyo National Forest)
  - Alternative C: 249,400
  - Alternative D: 0

\textsuperscript{14} Process Paper, § II(B)(5).

\textsuperscript{15} See \textit{California v. Block}, 690 F.2d 753, 765 (9th Cir. 1982) (invalidating as unduly narrow range of alternatives that would have designated a maximum of 33% of roadless acreage as recommended wilderness – nearly \textit{twice} the proportion that the forests now intend to carry forward for NEPA analysis).

\textsuperscript{16} FSH 1909.12, ch. 70, § 72.

\textsuperscript{17} Process Paper, § I(B)(1).
the presence of a single motorized trail was sufficient to exclude an area; etc.). Second, the forests evaluated the sub-polygons “to determine whether they lack wilderness characteristics due to the presence of authorized motor vehicle trails.”18 In doing so, the forests considered the prevalence of motorized trails and the level of commitment to those trails, “based on the assumption that areas networked with motorized trails will not have high potential for wilderness recommendation because they will likely lack wilderness character.” As described above, this preliminary evaluation of motorized uses is improper under Chapter 70.

Finally, the process paper claims that, based on public input received through Talking Points and scoping comments, the forests decided to “retain all the sub-polygons for evaluation, even those that contained designated motor vehicle trails.”19 It is unclear whether this simply articulates the approach described on the region’s “Wilderness Inventory and Evaluation” webpage that areas with authorized motorized trails (about 19% of the final inventory) were excluded from detailed evaluation, or whether the forests entirely abandoned the improper initial evaluation screen of areas with motorized trails. The forests should clarify how, if at all, areas with authorized motorized trails were treated differently in the wilderness evaluation (e.g., were the sub-polygons included in the “evaluation polygons” described in section I(C)?).

### B. Evaluation of wilderness characteristics

The process paper describes that the interdisciplinary teams for each forest populated spreadsheets for each evaluation polygon based on a list of questions contained in “Attachment – Evaluation of Wilderness Character.”20 The questions in that attachment generally reflect the questions listed in the “Wilderness Evaluation Narrative Outline” on which we commented in our October 30, 2014 letter. Unfortunately, it appears that the agency did not correct the deficiencies we highlighted in that letter.

For example, the attachment improperly evaluates the naturalness criterion by focusing a number of questions on the area’s ecological or historical naturalness or integrity, rather than its apparent naturalness, as required under the Wilderness Act and the Chapter 70 directives. The evaluation of the naturalness criterion must focus on whether the area generally appears natural to the average, reasonable visitor who is unfamiliar with the area’s historical or ecological conditions. For example, Chapter 70 makes clear that the agency is to evaluate “[t]he extent to which the area appears to reflect ecological conditions that would normally be associated with the area without human intervention.”21 Yet the attachment asks “[t]o what extent does the area reflect conditions that would normally be associated with the area absent human intervention,” including “[d]oes the area have ecological integrity” and “[w]hat are” the ecological conditions of soil, air, riparian, hydrologic, and other resources.22 As we described in our October 30, 2014 letter, while air quality or soil conditions are not a proper measure of an area’s naturalness, the appearance of the area’s air or soil to an average visitor

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18 Process Paper, § I(B)(2).
19 Process Paper, § I(B)(3).
20 Process Paper, § I(C).
21 FSH 1909.12, ch. 70, § 72.1(1)(b).
22 Attachment – Evaluation of Wilderness Character, § 1(b).
would be: if the air appears polluted or the soil appears heavily eroded, the area may not satisfy the naturalness criterion. Other questions in section 1 of the attachment likewise fail to reflect the agency’s duty to evaluate the area’s apparent naturalness.

More broadly, it remains unclear how the forests balanced and considered the numerous inputs in the spreadsheet. For example, the Wilderness Act and Chapter 70 directives make clear that an area need only possess outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation. Thus, the evaluation must consider questions related to those characteristics separately from one another, and cannot aggregate, average, or otherwise conflate the two. Yet later on the process paper suggests that the forests may in fact have conflated the two by screening out polygons with opportunities for primitive recreation but where opportunities for solitude are compromised.

C. Narrative summaries of evaluations

The process paper provides that the spreadsheets were then used to write draft summaries of the wilderness characteristics for each evaluation polygon. While the narratives will include “descriptions” of each area’s wilderness characteristics, the process paper does not suggest that they will document whether or not the forests weighed and compared the relative wilderness characteristics of each area to inform the determination of which areas or portions of areas to carry forward for analysis. Moreover, the narratives have yet to be shared with the public and may not even be complete, despite the fact that the forests have already determined which areas to carry forward for NEPA analysis, formulated alternatives for the DEIS, and presumably drafted significant portions of the analysis itself. The process paper provides no explanation for why the draft narratives were not shared with the public as part of the evaluation. In contrast, the Flathead National Forest earlier this year released the results of its Chapter 70 evaluation process for public comment several months before producing its DEIS. The Flathead evaluated all 25 of its Wilderness Inventory Areas, totaling 620,000 acres, and compiled the results, including maps of each area, in a 172-page document that was appended to the Flathead’s proposed action and scoping notice. While the Flathead may not carry forward all of those areas into the DEIS analysis phase, it will be able to make that determination based in part on public response to the evaluation, consistent with the requirements of Chapter 70.

D. Information sources

The process paper identifies four information sources for the identification of areas brought forward for NEPA analysis. In addition to the draft wilderness evaluation inventories, scoping comments, and other public input, the paper lists “Guidance for Consideration of Evaluated Areas for Recommendation in an Alternative.” This guidance document is unilluminating and just recites basic principles and criteria from

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23 16 U.S.C. § 1131(c)(2); FSH 1909.12, ch. 70, § 72.1(2).
24 See Process Paper, § II(B)(5)(a)(ii).
25 Process paper, § II(D)(1).
26 See Process Paper, § II(E) (explaining that public input “is being considered in the development of the evaluation narratives in an iterative process”).
28 Process Paper, § II(A).
the Wilderness Act and the Chapter 70 directives. Notably, information from the Talking Points system – arguably the only opportunity for public input on the evaluation – is not listed as an information source.

E. Initial recommendations

The process paper describes the forests’ process for making “initial recommendations” of areas to be brought forward for NEPA analysis.\(^\text{29}\) The process described is contrary to the Chapter 70 directives in a number of respects.

First, the determination of which evaluated areas or portions of areas to carry forward for NEPA analysis is not meant to be an “initial recommendation.” Rather, the determination of areas to carry forward is the first step in the analysis phase of the Chapter 70 process.\(^\text{30}\) Any recommendation must follow and be informed by the analysis in the plan EIS and public input.\(^\text{31}\) The process paper repeats in a number of places this misconception that the areas carried forward for analysis are initial recommendations.\(^\text{32}\)

Second, the process paper describes the draft evaluation narratives as “the primary foundation for the initial identification of potential recommended wilderness areas.” Under Chapter 70, the determination of areas to carry forward for analysis must be “[b]ased on the evaluation and input from public participation opportunities.”\(^\text{33}\) As described above, the draft evaluation narratives have not been subject to public input and may in fact still be in development. Thus, the narratives almost certainly failed to provide an adequate foundation for the forests’ “initial recommendations.”

Third, the process paper describes identification of the areas “with the highest quality of wilderness character” as the “starting point.” Beyond the example of “areas with high characteristics adjacent to existing wilderness,” the paper provides no criteria for how those areas were identified (e.g., by assigning an overall ranking to each area). Nor does it provide a rationale for why this is an appropriate starting point (as opposed to, for example, excluding the least-suitable areas). Indeed, this approach suggests that the forest supervisors may have focused from the outset on the small subset of areas that they intend to recommend at the end of the planning process, rather than identify areas that are responsive to public input, reflect the results of the evaluation, and provide a range of alternatives.

Fourth, the process paper identifies “the feasibility of management as wilderness such as the need to maintain the ability to undertake vegetation management to protect infrastructure and communities from wildfire” as a “consideration for inclusion.” Consideration of such management trade-offs is inappropriate for the evaluation of an area’s wilderness character or the determination of areas to carry forward for analysis – which must be based on the evaluation and public input. It appears that the agency may have confused manageability in the evaluation with management trade-offs that are appropriate considerations during the analysis in the DEIS. In contrast to management trade-offs such as how recommending an area for wilderness designation might affect vegetation management, the

\(^{29}\) Process Paper, § II(B)(1).
\(^{30}\) FSH 1909.12, ch. 70, § 73.
\(^{31}\) FSH 1909.12, ch. 70, § 74.
\(^{32}\) Process Paper, §§ II(B)(1)(b), II(B)(2).
\(^{33}\) FSH 1909.12, ch. 70, § 73.
evaluation looks only at “the degree to which the area may be managed to preserve its wilderness characteristics,” considering factors such as its shape and configuration, legally established rights or uses, relevant federal or state laws, the presence of non-Federal land, and management of adjacent lands.\(^{34}\) The same improper consideration is repeated later in the process paper as the “second screen” for the ongoing identification of additional areas to bring forward for NEPA analysis.

Fifth, the process paper describes that “polygons were assessed for the presence of infrastructure (motorized trails, mountain bike trails), or established activities that are incompatible with wilderness (groomed snowmobile trails, existing land uses requiring motorized access).” This consideration, as written, is also inconsistent with the Chapter 70 directives. First, the presence of infrastructure or incompatible uses is relevant only to the extent that they diminish the area’s naturalness or opportunities for solitude or primitive recreation.\(^ {35}\) Notably, infrastructure and other improvements in the evaluation areas have already been determined to be “substantially unnoticeable” pursuant to the Chapter 70 inventory process.\(^{36}\) Moreover, existing land uses requiring motorized access (e.g., grazing) may in some instances be grandfathered in to designated wilderness subject to reasonable restrictions.\(^ {37}\) More broadly, authorized motorized uses do not necessarily diminish an area’s wilderness character, as described above in regards to the forests’ consideration of motorized trails.

Sixth, the process paper describes that “[a]reas that did not have the highest quality characteristics but had wide public support were typically included.” The paper provides no explanation of how such areas were identified (e.g., previously included in wilderness legislation or citizens’ wilderness proposals; were highlighted on the Talking Points system; etc.). Moreover, the 10 areas that were initially identified to be carried forward for analysis do not seem to reflect this consideration. For example, numerous areas that were included in wilderness legislation garnering broad public support were excluded.

Seventh, the process paper describes preparing maps and narratives for the “initial recommended wilderness areas.” The paper asserts that the forests “refined the boundary for each” of the areas, but provides no information about the criteria utilized to refine the boundaries.

Finally, there is no discussion in the process paper of how or why 92% of the inventoried areas were excluded from the “initial recommendations.” Indeed, the process paper only mentions documenting the forests’ rationales for the excluded areas in a brief final sentence that the “evaluation narratives and rationales for areas not being brought forward are being completed.”\(^ {38}\) Chapter 70 requires that “[f]or each evaluated area or portions thereof that are not included in an alternative in the applicable NEPA analysis, the Responsible Official shall document the reason for excluding it from further analysis.”\(^ {39}\) Absent a methodology or rationale for excluding areas, the determination not to carry them forward for analysis appears highly arbitrary.

\(^{34}\) FSH 1909.12, ch. 70, § 72.1(5).
\(^{35}\) See FSH 1909.12, ch. 70, § 72.1.
\(^{36}\) See FSH 1909.12, ch. 70, § 71.22b.
\(^{38}\) Process Paper, § III.
\(^{39}\) FSH 1909.12, ch. 70, § 73.
F. Development of draft rationale statements

The process paper asserts that the forests have “started drafting summaries of the evaluation narratives aimed at addressing the question whether the individual polygons, or portions of those polygons, would be suitable as recommended wilderness or not.” There are a number of problems with the process and considerations described in this section of the process paper.

As an initial matter, it is unclear whether these “summaries of the evaluation narratives” are the same thing as the “draft evaluation narratives” described in section I(D)(1) of the process paper. The evaluation narratives should, as we understand it, describe the results of the wilderness evaluation pursuant to section 72 of the Chapter 70 directives (and should have been shared with the public for feedback prior to the determination of areas to carry forward for analysis). That is separate and distinct from the required rationale for determining that areas or portions of areas should not be carried forward for NEPA analysis pursuant to section 73 of the Chapter 70 directives. The criteria and considerations described in this section of the process paper suggest that the forests misunderstand this distinction and are planning to document the results of the wilderness evaluation in the “rationale statements.”

More broadly, it is highly troubling that the forests are developing their rationales after determining which areas to carry forward for analysis. As we have repeatedly stressed, the rationale (based on a transparent and repeatable methodology) should be the basis for the determination—not a post-hoc justification. The approach articulated in the process paper is contrary to the letter and intent of the 2012 planning rule and Chapter 70 directives to provide a transparent and science-based process that has benefitted from meaningful public engagement.

G. Review of scoping comments and additional public input and identification of additional areas

While we appreciate the forests undertaking a review of additional public input and identifying additional areas to carry forward for analysis, that review is somewhat meaningless where the public has yet to review the wilderness evaluation methodology or results—including the draft evaluation narratives and rationales for excluding 92% of the inventoried areas. For example, the process paper explains that “[t]he Forest Supervisors considered all areas the public had expressed an interest in and compared any information the public provided regarding these areas with the evaluations Forest Service staff had prepared.” Yet absent access to the methods or results of the agency’s evaluation, any public input has been severely hamstrung by lack of information and transparency.

The process paper lists the “screens” the forests are using in identifying additional areas to carry forward. While many of these screens accurately reflect the relevant evaluation criteria in Chapter 70, others do not. For example, the agency may only consider pervasive sights and sounds originating

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40 Process Paper, § II(B)(3).
41 Process Paper, §§ II(B)(4)-(5).
outside the area in evaluating the degree to which the area has outstanding opportunities for solitude.\footnote{Compare FSH 1909.12, ch. 70, § 72.1(2)(a), with Process Paper, § II(B)(5)(a)(ii).} And, as described above, it is inappropriate to consider whether existing activities and potential future management needs conflict with preserving an area’s wilderness characteristics. Those management trade-offs should be analyzed in the DEIS. Proper consideration of an area’s manageability is limited to the types of considerations enumerated in section 72.1(5) of the Chapter 70 directives (e.g., shape and configuration, presence of non-Federal land, etc.).

Finally, there is no acknowledgment in this or other sections of the process paper of the agency’s obligation under NEPA to ensure a range of reasonable alternatives. As described in more detail above, the inclusion of an additional 128,400 acres (for a total of approximately 249,400 acres, or just under 18% of the inventoried acreage analyzed in one alternative) – while a step in the right direction – does not remedy the range of alternatives or other deficiencies identified in this letter.

V. Recommendations

To remedy the serious deficiencies identified in this and our previous letters, the Sierra, Sequoia, and Inyo National Forests must: (a) correct the process deficiencies identified in this letter; (b) release the draft evaluation narratives (and any other relevant documentation of the results of the wilderness evaluation) for public review and comment; (c) based on public input, correct any additional deficiencies with the evaluation; (d) then, based on the final evaluation and public input, determine which areas or portions of areas to carry forward for NEPA analysis, ensuring a range of reasonable alternatives; and (e) proceed with the DEIS analysis. This necessarily will require the agency to take a step back and delay the release of the DEIS.

However, recognizing the significant work the forests have put into this process to date and the reality that the DEIS is unlikely to be delayed at this point, we would like to propose an alternative solution. In addition to the ongoing identification of additional areas to carry forward for analysis, the forests would include in one alternative all, or the vast majority of, the inventoried areas. This approach would ensure an adequate range of alternatives under NEPA.\footnote{See, e.g., Council on Environmental Quality, NEPA’s Forty Most Asked Questions, 46 Fed. Reg. 18,026 (Mar. 23, 1981) (suggesting that an appropriate range of alternatives “might include dedicating 0, 10, 30, 50, 70, 90, or 100 percent of the Forest to wilderness”); Mont. Wilderness Ass’n v. Connell, 725 F.3d 988, 1004-05 (9th Cir. 2013) (upholding range of alternatives for national monument plan that would have opened between 0 and 10 (the total number existing) backcountry airstrips, including several mid-range alternatives).} It also would provide for a robust analysis of the trade-offs and impacts associated with recommending most – if not all – of the inventoried areas. Such analysis is consistent with the dual purposes of NEPA to ensure informed and transparent decision-making. Finally, this approach would provide the agency with the breathing room to make additional changes to its draft evaluation in response to public comment on the DEIS and the associated wilderness evaluation appendix. We look forward to discussing this possible solution with you.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the process paper and for your attention to the issues addressed in this letter. As always, we are eager to work with the agency to remedy these issues. Please don’t hesitate to contact us with any questions.
Sincerely,

Alison Flint  
Counsel and Planning Specialist  
The Wilderness Society

Susan Britting, Ph.D.  
Executive Director  
Sierra Forest Legacy

Jora Fogg  
Preservation Coordinator  
Friends of the Inyo

Frances A. Hunt  
Eastern Sierra Organizer  
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Greg Suba  
Conservation Director  
California Native Plant Society

SFL et al. Comments on the DEIS for draft forest plans on the Inyo, Sequoia, and Sierra national forests (August 25, 2016)
Exhibit IX.3-14

SFL et al. Comments on the DEIS for draft forest plans on the Inyo, Sequoia, and Sierra national forests (August 25, 2016)

Don Rivenes
Executive Director
Forest Issues Group

Stan Van Velsor, Ph.D.
Senior Regional Representative
The Wilderness Society
December 1, 2015

Randy Moore, Regional Forester
USDA Forest Service, Pacific Southwest Region
1323 Club Drive
Vallejo, CA 9459

Via electronic mail

Re: wilderness evaluation process

Dear Regional Forester Moore and Forest Supervisors Armenta, Gould, and Elliott:

Several times over the past year we have expressed our serious concerns with the Sierra, Sequoia, and Inyo National Forests’ wilderness evaluation and identification of only 10 areas (about 121,000 acres, or just over 8% of the 1.4 million acres identified in the final wilderness inventory) to carry forward for analysis in the upcoming DEIS. As our October 30, 2014, June 3, 2015, and August 28, 2015 letters explained in detail, the forests’ approach is contrary to the letter and intent of Forest Service Handbook 1909.12, Chapter 70 and will inappropriately constrain the range of alternatives in the DEIS.¹

¹ The analysis of alternatives is the “heart” of an EIS, and agencies must “[r]igorously explore and objectively evaluate all reasonable alternatives” to a proposed action. 40 C.F.R. § 1502.14. We have been informed that the forests intend to identify an additional 128,400 acres to carry forward for analysis in one alternative (just under

SFL et al. Comments on the DEIS for draft forest plans on the Inyo, Sequoia, and Sierra national forests (August 25, 2016)
Our August 28, 2015 comment letter described how the draft wilderness evaluation process paper only confirms that the forests determined which areas to carry forward for analysis and formulated DEIS alternatives prior to articulating a transparent methodology for the wilderness evaluation, completing the evaluation, or sharing the methodology or results of the evaluation with the public. These problems have yet to be addressed. For example, the public has yet to see the narratives that “provided the primary foundation” for the identification of areas to carry forward for NEPA analysis or any rationale for the 92% of evaluated areas that the forest supervisors did not identify for inclusion in the DEIS. Because the final process paper posted on the wilderness inventory and evaluation webpage does not address the concerns we raised in our August 28 comments on the draft process paper, we are re-submitting those comments now.

Recognizing that the forests have put significant work into the wilderness evaluation and in an effort to limit delay in issuing the DEIS, we would like to propose a solution that would remedy to some extent our concerns with the Chapter 70 process: one alternative in the DEIS should include all, or the vast majority of, the 1.4 million acres of inventoried areas as recommended wilderness. This would ensure an adequate range of alternatives and a robust analysis of the trade-offs and impacts associated with recommending most (if not all) of the inventoried areas.

This approach would also better facilitate additional changes to the evaluation in response to public comment on the DEIS – which presumably will be the first time the public has an opportunity to comment on the results of the evaluation. Without at least one alternative recommending as wilderness most if not all inventoried areas, the Forest Service risks having to conduct supplemental NEPA in order to respond adequately to issues raised by the public related to the DEIS.

Thank you for your attention, and please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions.

Sincerely,

Alison Flint
Counsel and Planning Specialist
The Wilderness Society

18% of the inventoried acreage). That additional acreage is still insufficient to ensure a range of reasonable alternatives. See California v. Block, 690 F.2d 753, 765 (9th Cir. 1982) (range of alternatives that designated no more than 33% of roadless acreage to wilderness unreasonably narrow).

See Council on Environmental Quality, NEPA’s Forty Most Asked Questions, 46 Fed. Reg. 18,026 (Mar. 23, 1981) (“When there are potentially a very large number of alternatives, only a reasonable number of examples, covering the full spectrum of alternatives, must be analyzed and compared in the EIS. An appropriate series of alternatives might include dedicating 0, 10, 30, 50, 70, 90, or 100 percent of the Forest to wilderness.”); California, 690 F.2d at 765, 768-69 (in addition to considering an alternative that allocated 100% of inventoried roadless areas to wilderness, “it was unreasonable for the Forest Service to overlook the obvious alternative of allocating more than a third of the RARE II acreage to a Wilderness designation”); cf. Mont. Wilderness Ass’n v. Connell, 725 F.3d 988, 1004-05 (9th Cir. 2013) (range of alternatives for national monument plan that would have opened between 0 and 10 (the total number existing) backcountry airstrips, including several mid-range alternatives, was reasonable).
Susan Britting, Ph.D.
Executive Director
Sierra Forest Legacy

Frances A. Hunt
Eastern Sierra Organizer
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Steve Evans
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SFL et al. Comments on the DEIS for draft forest plans on the Inyo, Sequoia, and Sierra national forests (August 25, 2016)
Malcolm Clark  
Range of Light Group (Toiyabe Chapter), Sierra Club

Patricia Puterbaugh  
Yahi Group, Sierra Club

Don Rivenes  
Executive Director  
Forest Issues Group

Patricia Puterbaugh  
Lassen Forest Preservation Group

Stan Van Velsor, Ph.D.  
Senior Regional Representative  
The Wilderness Society

SFL et al. Comments on the DEIS for draft forest plans on the Inyo, Sequoia, and Sierra national forests (August 25, 2016)
December 1, 2015

Forest Supervisor Ed Armenta
Inyo National Forest

Forest Supervisor Kevin B. Elliott
Sequoia National Forest

Forest Supervisor Dean Gould
Sierra National Forest

Via CARA.Ecosystem-Management.org web site

Re: Comments on Early Adopter Forests Wilderness Evaluation Process

Dear Forest Supervisors:

Thank you for seeking public input concerning the wilderness evaluation process for the early adopter forests prior to the release of the draft forest plan revisions. The California Wilderness Coalition (CalWild) has previously submitted extensive scoping comments and joined with our conservation partners in submitting written comments on the wilderness inventory and evaluation. CalWild is taking this specific opportunity to share our concerns about the wilderness evaluation process to date and provide specific examples as to how these concerns apply to potential wilderness areas.

We appreciate the information provided about the wilderness evaluation process. Perhaps the most glaring problem with this process is the lack of information in regard to why many inventoried areas were not chosen for consideration in the evaluation process, particularly since only about 8% of the roadless acreage inventoried is apparently being considered for further evaluation. It is difficult for the public to provide meaningful comments on the process or on specific areas subject to the process without this vital information.

CalWild presents these examples to facilitate an open exchange of ideas and concepts with the Forest Service and with the hope that the wilderness evaluation will be improved in the draft forest plan revisions.
Glass Mountain Potential Recommended Wilderness (Inyo National Forest) –

CalWild appreciates that the Forest Service identified the Glass Mountain area as a potential wilderness. We agree that its ecological integrity, diverse vegetation communities, ecological features of scientific value, outstanding geologic features, rare plant species, large number of documented prehistoric cultural sites, and opportunities for solitude and primitive and unconfined recreation make it an excellent candidate for wilderness protection. In addition, the recommended potential wilderness would provide an important overlay of protection to the existing upper portion of the O’Harrel Canyon Critical Aquatic Refuge (CAR).

However, there is no information provided in the evaluation materials as to why only 17,440 acres of a more than 59,000-acre roadless area is considered in the evaluation. We queried forest staff about this and the verbal response was that the primary acreage reduction is associated with the exclusion of sage grouse habitat from the potential wilderness. This resulted in much of the lower elevations of the southwestern portion of the roadless area from being excluded for wilderness consideration.

CalWild agrees that the sage grouse and its habitat require special protection, but we believe that wilderness will help to protect the species and its habitat. Nothing in the Sage-Grouse Bi-State Action Plan (March 2012) precludes wilderness management or indicates any inherent conflict with sage-grouse habitat management and protection.

According to the Plan, human activities that pose the highest threat to the Long Valley population of sage grouse are wildfire, the Benton Crossing Landfill, recreation and human disturbance, and urbanization. Two of these high threats – the landfill and urbanization – have nothing to do with the Glass Mountain roadless area (other than their proximity). As for the high threat from recreation and human disturbance, the Forest Service’s description of this potential wilderness notes that the steep topography, lack of recreation facilities (including trails), and lack of surface water limits visitor use. This situation would continue under wilderness management.

As for the high threat from wildfire, nothing in the Wilderness Act precludes fuels and wildfire management that may be needed to protect sage grouse and its habitat. In addition, telemetry for the Long Valley population indicates most sage grouse activity is well outside the roadless area. In any case, this issue should not preclude consideration of more than half of the roadless area for wilderness.

Considering more of the roadless area for wilderness would expand its ecological diversity by including the lower elevation sagebrush vegetation community. Sagebrush ecosystems found in the lower elevation of the Glass Mountain area comprise less than 5% of the ecosystems represented in the National Wilderness Preservation System. In addition, some specific areas excluded due to the sage
grouse habitat concern have exceptional ecological and wildlife values. For example, McLaughlin Creek in the excluded western portion of the roadless area provides both surface water and suitable habitat for prairie falcon. It is also an old historic stagecoach route.

Recommendation: CalWild urges that all of the Glass Mountain roadless area be further evaluated and recommended for wilderness protection.

**White Mountains Addition and Deep Springs North Potential Recommended Wilderness (Inyo National Forest)** –

CalWild concurs that these areas provide good opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation, possess intact ecosystem types, include an important ecological and scientific/ecological feature (Ancient Bristle Cone Pine Forest), and support a pinyon-juniper forest ecosystem underrepresented in the National System (less than 10%). Further, the areas’ proximity to the existing White Mountains Wilderness and Cottonwood Creek Wild & Scenic River complement and enhance the natural and cultural values represented in these protected areas.

However, the fact that the evaluation presents them separately, without acknowledgement of their close proximity and without apparent recognition that they are connected by roadless lands separated only by narrow road and motorized trail corridors, represents a major flaw in the evaluation process. It also has the perhaps inadvertent effect of excluding most of the major streams that provide important surface water for riparian ecosystems, wildlife, and recreation. In addition, it leaves out much of the pinyon-juniper ecosystem that should be protected.

By cherry-stemming the primary road and motorized trail in this area (6S01, 35E301), more than 18,000 acres of roadless land could be added to potential
wilderness, without largely affecting existing motorized uses. This would enhance all of the values that make these areas suitable for wilderness protection. The precedent for cherry-stemming has already been established with motorized trail 35E301 in the existing White Mountains Wilderness, as well as with many other existing wilderness areas throughout the state.

Perhaps this alternative has already been considered, but because the evaluation materials do not include areas or portions of areas excluded from consideration, the public has no way of knowing of this option was included in the evaluation.

Recommendation: CalWild urges that a larger potential White Mountains Wilderness addition be considered by including all inventoried roadless lands surrounding the White Mountains Additions and Deep Springs North area, separated by cherry-stemmed road and motorized trail corridors.

**Domeland West Addition Potential Recommended Wilderness (Sequoia National Forest)**

CalWild agrees that protecting the Domeland West area would expand protection for ecosystems minimally represented in the Wilderness System, provide opportunities for solitude and primitive and unconfined recreation, and protect interesting scenic values of dome lands and historic and prehistoric sites. In addition, CalWild believes that this addition would further protect the Twisselman Botanical Area, which supports the southernmost grove of foxtail pines and is one of the few places where five kinds of pines grow together on the same slope.

Unfortunately, this proposed 7,420-acre potential addition to the Domeland Wilderness (along with the even smaller 1,460-acre Domeland North area) is only a fraction of the much larger 44,400-acre Woodpecker roadless area. Unfortunately
since 1977, the trail system throughout this roadless area has largely become motorized and some trail segments have been transformed into roads. Even worse, the Forest Service’s strict adherence in the wilderness evaluation process to avoid any trail technically designated for motorized or mechanical use apparently further limits consideration of reasonable alternatives to expand the Domeland Wilderness.

For example, the Siretta Trail (34E12) defines much of the western boundary of this proposed addition, presumably because this trail is open to both motorcycle and mountain bike use. During a July 2015 field trip, we found no evidence of motorcycle or mountain bike tire tracks on this trail after the first couple of hundred yards or so. More than 99% of the trail, from the Cannel Meadow Trail (33E32) intersection north over Siretta Pass was free of any evidence of motorized or mechanical travel.

Again, because the wilderness evaluation materials available to the public to date only feature the minimal areas identified as potential wilderness, we have no way of knowing whether including the Siretta Trail in the Domeland West addition and moving the boundary westward to the Cannel Meadow Trail was even considered.

Using the Cannell Meadow Trail as the western boundary of this potential addition has several advantages. This boundary adjustment would include all of Little Trout Creek watershed, including tributaries Machine and Snow Creeks, which contribute significant flow into Trout Creek, an existing designated CAR. Ultimately, including the Little Trout subwatershed in the Domeland Wilderness will help maintain the biotic integrity of the South Fork Kern watershed and the free flowing character and outstanding values of the South Fork Kern Wild & Scenic River. As noted previously, expanding the boundary westward would also fully protect the Twisselman Botanical Area and its unique assemblage of foxtail pines and other pine species.
Recommendation: CalWild urges that the western boundary of the Domeland West Recommended Potential Wilderness Addition be moved west to the Cannell Meadow Trail. Any reason(s) why this is not feasible should be made available to the public.

**Rincon-Chico-Cannell Roadless Areas (Sequoia National Forest) –**

These important roadless areas were not included in the wilderness evaluation materials, so the public remains uninformed as to why they failed to make the cut of potential recommended wilderness areas.

Consideration of these roadless areas as potential wilderness is crucial to the protection of the biotic integrity of the North Fork Kern and ultimately of the free flowing character and outstanding values of the North Fork Kern Wild & Scenic River. The Sierra Nevada Ecosystem Project (SNEP) Final Report to Congress (1996) included Chapter 34, *Biotic Integrity of Watersheds*. This chapter assessed the biological health of one hundred Sierra Nevada hydrologic subareas (watersheds).

Each watershed was given a biotic integrity number between 1-100. Metrics used to assess biotic integrity and provide a biotic integrity index number included the presence of native fish and frogs, native fish assemblages, and anadromous fish. Other factors included number of dams, reservoirs, and diversions in the watershed; percentage of roads and roadless areas, percentage of area historically fishless, and mean elevation. Watersheds with a biotic integrity number between 80-100 possess aquatic communities in very good to excellent condition. Watersheds in the 60-79 range possess aquatic communities in good condition, 40-59 indicated aquatic communities in fair condition, and less than 40 represent aquatic communities in poor condition.

Not surprisingly, both the North Fork Kern and South Fork Kern watersheds were found to have good biotic integrity and are, in fact, among the top 12 of the 100 watersheds assessed. Both the presence of native fish and the roadless nature of much of their watersheds are key factors contributing to their biotic integrity and ultimately to the free flowing character and outstanding values of both the North Fork and South Fork Kern Wild & Scenic Rivers. In addition, the Forest Service itself has identified portions of the North Fork Kern watershed as CARs (Rincon, Fairview). Further, all three roadless areas support or provide suitable habitat for a number of sensitive, threatened, and endangered plant and animal species. The Cannell and Chico roadless areas also possess ecosystems that are severely underrepresented (less than 5%) in the National System.

Because the wilderness evaluation materials made available to the public for comment do not include areas not recommended as potential wilderness, it is unknown whether the important contribution to biotic integrity these roadless areas provide was even considered. Admittedly, the presence of motorized and mountain bike trails in these roadless areas may be significant factors weighing
against their consideration, but the public simply cannot assess this without area-specific information as to why these and other areas were eliminated from further consideration.

**Recommendation:** CalWild urges the reassessment of the Rincon, Chico, and Cannell roadless areas as potential recommended wilderness. Protecting these areas, with appropriate boundary adjustments to avoid motorized/mechanical use trails as much as possible, would help ensure protection of the sensitive and unique upper Kern River watersheds.

Because the Forest Service has not provided information as to why roadless areas were eliminated from consideration in the wilderness evaluation, it is unknown whether the crucial role that roadless areas play in maintaining good biotic integrity of watersheds (SNEP 1996) was even considered. This problem particularly affects roadless areas both recommended in and eliminated from the wilderness evaluation on the Sequoia and Sierra Forests.

Watersheds/roadless areas addressed in these comments include: Kern Watershed/Woodpecker, Rincon, Chico, Cannell; SF Kings Watershed-Kings River; NF Kings-Dinkey Lakes; Sycamore Creek/Sycamore Springs; SF Merced/Devil Gulch, Mount Raymond.

**Monarch Addition Potential Recommended Wilderness (Sierra National Forest-Giant Sequoia National Monument) –**

CalWild appreciates the Forest Service’s potential wilderness recommendation for the Monarch Wilderness addition. We concur that this area will protect connectivity between very low elevations to the west and the high country of the Monarch Wilderness and Kings Canyon National Park to the east, facilitate species migration (particularly in response to climate change), includes a variety of ecological zones that are less common in the Wilderness System, and provides opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation. We add that it also includes the Kings River National Recreation Trail, segments of the Kings River protected and considered
eligible as a National Wild & Scenic River, a segment of the river designated by California as a Wild Trout Stream. In addition, CalWild believes that protecting the roadless area will help protect the biotic integrity of the Kings River.

Unfortunately, the Forest Service’s potential recommended wilderness is shockingly inadequate, because it only addresses the northern portion of the roadless area on the Sierra National Forest. The entire southern portion of the roadless area in the Giant Sequoia National Monument (GSNM, formerly part of the Sequoia National Forest) was apparently not considered or it was eliminated. As a result, the recommendation only encompasses 25,800 acres of a 54,000-acre roadless area.

The southern portion of the roadless area shares the same wilderness attributes already delineated and adds to those attributes. It includes Giant Sequoia groves, which increases the area’s ecological diversity. Because of its north-facing aspect, the southern portion of the Kings River roadless area supports ecosystems underrepresented (less than 10%) in the National System. It also includes Mill Flat Creek, a Forest Service designated CAR. Including the southern portion of the roadless area will also more fully protect the biotic integrity of the Kings River.

Again, it is unknown as to why the entire Kings River roadless area was not identified as part of the potential recommended wilderness, but it may be because the southern portion of the roadless area is within the GSNM. It is important to note that the GSNM was included in the wilderness inventory that preceded the evaluation. Further, no comprehensive wilderness inventory and evaluation was conducted as part of the GSNM Plan. So it seems reasonable that the southern area should have been included in the evaluation, unless it was eliminated for reasons as yet undisclosed to the public.

Looking across the Kings River, from within the Monarch Potential Recommended Wilderness Addition into the southern portion of the Kings River roadless area. The southern portion was either not considered or eliminated from the wilderness evaluation, for reasons that remain unknown to the public. The southern area shares and adds considerably to the Monarch Addition’s overall wilderness attributes – including providing for climate change generated species migration – that make this area an excellent candidate for wilderness protection.
**Recommendation:** CalWild urges that the entire Kings River roadless area, within the Sierra National Forest and Giant Sequoia National Monument, be evaluated and recommended for wilderness.

**Dinkey Lakes and Sycamore Springs Roadless Areas (Sierra National Forest) –**

These roadless areas were not included in the wilderness evaluation, despite substantial wilderness qualities. Both areas contribute significantly to the biotic integrity of the Dinkey Creek watershed (identified in the Biotic Integrity of Watersheds SNEP Chapter as Sycamore Creek). Both areas include ecosystems underrepresented in the Wilderness System on the Sierra Forest. They also possess extremely high wilderness recreation and scenery attributes. CalWild believes that Dinkey Creek, which flows through both areas, is also eligible for Wild & Scenic River protection.

Upper Dinkey Creek in the Dinkey Lakes roadless area flows through a spectacular glacially-carved granite canyon, over numerous waterfalls and cascades, all dominated by the brooding edifice of Dinkey Dome. This canyon also offers a seasonal class V whitewater opportunity known to expert kayakers as the “Infinislide.” Portions of this roadless area supports old growth forests that provide important habitat for the Pacific fisher and pine martin. Separated by only a narrow OHV trail corridor, this roadless areas shares and enhances many of the qualities of the Dinkey Lakes Wilderness.

![Upper Dinkey Creek’s “Infinislide” run in the Dinkey Lakes roadless areas. Dinkey Dome is on the horizon. Photo courtesy of Darin McQuoid.](image)

Lower Dinkey Creek flows through the Sycamore Springs roadless area. This area is virtually trail-less. Its primary wilderness recreation and scenic attribute is class V-V+ whitewater boating for expert kayakers. Darin McQuoid, a wilderness kayaker and world class outdoor photographer describes the lower creek thusly:

> Dinkey Creek has made the transition from hardcore paddling to a modern classic. This once rarely paddled run has become a marquee destination for both out of state boaters and local paddlers. With warm weather almost guaranteed due to low elevation and a
somewhat southern Sierra location, Dinkey Creek is a true gem of California. [http://darinmcquoid.com/dinkeycreek.html](http://darinmcquoid.com/dinkeycreek.html)

Both roadless areas certainly deserve evaluation as potential wilderness. And Dinkey Creek should be studied for its eligibility and suitability as a potential Wild & Scenic River. Unfortunately, the Wild & Scenic River inventories in the forest plan revisions have yet to be released for public review.

**Recommendation:** CalWild urges that both the Dinkey Lakes and Sycamore Springs roadless areas be evaluated or reconsidered for potential wilderness.

**Ferguson Ridge-Devil Gulch and Mount Raymond Roadless Areas (Sierra National Forest)**

These roadless areas were not included in the wilderness evaluation, despite substantial wilderness qualities. Both areas contribute significantly to the biotic integrity of the South Fork Merced watershed and the South Fork Merced Wild & Scenic River.

The Ferguson Ridge-Devil Gulch area was proposed as Wilderness in Senator Barbara Boxer’s California Wild Heritage Act of 2002 (and subsequent bills). The Hite Cove Trail, which follows the South Fork Merced and leads into the heart of this roadless area, is considered one of the best wildflower viewing trails in the low to mid-elevations of the central Sierra Nevada. The entire area is rich in Gold Rush history and its geologic formations include some of the oldest gold-bearing strata in the Sierra Nevada. The area also supports at least four sensitive or rare plants. The South Fork's superior habitat for wild native fish is a state designated Wild Trout Stream. The area also represents mixed conifer-oak woodland ecosystems underrepresented (less than 20%) in the National System. Directly adjacent to Yosemite National Park, protection of this area will complement and enhance the Park’s wilderness qualities and provide an important protected biological corridor for species migration.
The Mount Raymond roadless area deserves protection as wilderness if only to protect the adjacent watershed of the South Fork Merced Wild & Scenic River. Protection of this relatively small roadless area will provide a crucial buffer for a river segment that forms the boundary of the park, essentially protecting the southern half of the river corridor. In addition, the area possesses substantial wilderness-quality scenic and recreation values.

**Recommendation:** CalWild urges that both the Ferguson Ridge-Devil Gulch and Mount Raymond roadless areas be evaluated or reconsidered for potential wilderness.

CalWild appreciates this opportunity to comment on the wilderness evaluation process in the forest plan revision process for the early adopter forests. We are looking forward to working with the Forest Service to improve this process and to review and comment on the draft forest plan revisions.

Sincerely,

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February 1, 2016

Randy Moore, Regional Forester
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1323 Club Drive
Vallejo, CA 9459

Via electronic mail

Re: Wilderness Evaluation Process and Areas Identified for DEIS Analysis

Thank you for providing the additional information on the wilderness evaluations for the Inyo, Sierra, and Sequoia National Forests and areas being considered for analysis in the upcoming DEIS, and for the opportunity to provide input. We are pleased that wilderness evaluation narratives have been written for each wilderness inventory polygon—as opposed to only those identified for DEIS analysis. We remain concerned, however, that the Forest Service has misapplied the wilderness evaluation criteria in section 2(c) of the Wilderness Act, 16 U.S.C. § 1131(c), and section 72 of the Chapter 70 directives, Forest Service Handbook (FSH) 1909.12, ch. 70, § 72. We have repeatedly notified the Forest Service about these concerns, including in
our August 28, 2015 comments on the wilderness evaluation process paper. Unfortunately, as described below, the wilderness evaluation narratives reveal that the agency did not implement our feedback about proper application of the evaluation criteria.

In addition, we remain concerned about how the information from the evaluation is being carried forward into the NEPA process. While an improvement over the 121,000 acres initially identified for DEIS analysis last May, the current proposal to carry forward only 495,366 – less than 32% of the final inventoried acreage – is still inadequate. It excludes areas recommended by The Wilderness Society and other members of the public during scoping, appears to exclude areas based on improper manageability considerations, and does not provide an adequate range of alternatives.

We hope that the Forest Service will remedy the issues identified in this and our previous letters prior to release of the DEIS, and that information submitted by the public will in fact help shape the content of the DEIS alternatives, as required by Chapter 70.

I. Deficiencies in Application of Wilderness Evaluation Criteria

The following discussion identifies a number of significant errors in the Forest Service’s application of the wilderness evaluation criteria in section 2(c) of the Wilderness Act, 16 U.S.C. § 1131(c), and section 72 of the Chapter 70 directives. We reviewed a limited subset of the evaluation narratives, including areas on the Sierra and Sequoia National Forests that we preliminarily recommended for wilderness designation in our November 17, 2014 supplemental scoping comments, and areas that we and other groups have recommended on the Inyo National Forest. Based on that limited review, we have identified a number of polygon narratives that exhibit each deficiency. These limited examples appear to be representative of more widespread misapplication of the criteria throughout the wilderness evaluation narratives. There are many other narratives that we have not highlighted that exhibit the same deficiencies and must be corrected. The Forest Service should remedy these deficiencies in its final wilderness evaluation narratives and ensure that they do not influence the determination of areas to carry forward for DEIS analysis, the analysis itself, or the decision of which areas to recommend for wilderness designation.

1 See The Wilderness Society, et al, Comments on Ch. 70 wilderness evaluation process (Oct. 30, 2014) (identifying numerous deficiencies with the “Wilderness Evaluation Narrative Outline”); The Wilderness Society, et al., Comments on Ch. 70 wilderness evaluation (June 3, 2015) (identifying process and range of alternatives deficiencies); The Wilderness Society, et al., Comments on Ch. 70 wilderness evaluation (Aug. 28, 2015) (identifying numerous deficiencies with the wilderness evaluation process paper); The Wilderness Society, et al., Comments on wilderness evaluation process (Dec. 1, 2015) (reiterating our process and range of alternatives concerns).

2 See FSH 1909.12, ch. 70, § 73 (identification of areas to carry forward for analysis must be “[b]ased on the evaluation and input from public participation opportunities”); see also Wilderness Evaluation FAQ, at 2 (Dec. 2015) (stating intention to utilize public comments to “help shape what is in the alternatives we release in the draft EIS”).
A. Apparent naturalness versus ecological integrity

As we described in detail in our October 30, 2014 and August 28, 2015 comments, the Forest Service appears to have improperly evaluated the naturalness criterion by focusing in large part on the area’s ecological or historical naturalness or integrity, rather than its *apparent* naturalness, as required under the Wilderness Act and the Chapter 70 directives. The evaluation of naturalness must focus on whether the area generally *appears* natural to the average, reasonable visitor who is unfamiliar with the area’s historical or ecological conditions. Chapter 70 makes clear that the agency is to evaluate “*[t]he extent to which the area *appears* to reflect ecological conditions that would normally be associated with the area without human intervention*” and whether “plant and animal communities *appear* substantially unnatural.”

Rather than evaluating the appearance of ecological conditions and plant and animal communities, many narratives simply categorize the relative ecological integrity of the area. For example, the naturalness discussion for Dexter Canyon (Polygon 91068) on the Inyo National Forest states that “the area is believed to have moderate ecological integrity” and then goes on to list the presence, absence, or condition of certain ecological features such as native fish, invasive plant species, riparian vegetation, soil quality, and air quality. While measures of an area’s ecological integrity may be relevant to whether it also contains ecological or other values, they are not a proper consideration of the area’s naturalness. Instead, the relevant inquiry is whether ecological conditions appear natural to the average visitor. The narrative for Dexter Canyon lacks any evaluation of how the area appears to the average visitor.

Similarly, many of the narratives note the presence of invasive plant species. For example, the narrative for Watterson Canyon (Polygon 944) on the Inyo National Forest notes that “[t]here is a departure from natural conditions due to the presence of invasive plant species (cheatgrass is expanding). Yet there is generally no indication of how the presence of those species affects how the area would be perceived by the average visitor. Absent an evaluation of whether and why those plant communities appear substantially unnatural, the mere presence of invasive species – which is ubiquitous in many areas – is irrelevant.

Of the narratives we reviewed, the apparent naturalness criterion appears to have been misapplied for Polygons 315, 340, 357, 539, 577, 586, 646, 772, 781, 819, 1012, 1068, 1179, 1236, 1242, 1246, 1258, 1281, 1339, 1355, 1357, 1361, 1378, 1391, and 1408, each of which focus on the ecological integrity and composition of plant and animal communities of the area,

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3 FSH 1909.12, ch. 70, § 72.1(1)(a)&(b) (emphasis added).
4 See 16 U.S.C. § 1131(c)(4); FSH 1909.12, ch. 70, § 72.1(a). Measures of ecological integrity should be based on scientific data. For example, we are pleased that the Forest Service has integrated into the evaluation The Wilderness Society’s data on ecological representation. See Dietz, M. S., R. T. Belote, G. H. Aplet, and J. L. Aycrigg. 2015. The world’s largest wilderness protection network after 50 years: an assessment of ecological system representation in the U.S. National Wilderness Preservation System. Biological Conservation 184:431-438.

SFL et al. Comments on the DEIS for draft forest plans on the Inyo, Sequoia, and Sierra national forests (August 25, 2016)
rather than how relevant ecological conditions and plant and animal communities appear to the average visitor.

**B. Consideration of human activities and improvements**

Many of the narratives also improperly rely on the presence of past or current human activities or improvements – such as mining, grazing, fish stocking, restoration activities, timber harvest, recreation developments, historic sites, or wildlife improvements – when evaluating naturalness. The relevant inquiry, however, is not the presence of these activities or improvements, but rather their effect on the area’s naturalness, as judged by the average visitor. Activities or improvements that are “substantially unnoticeable” do not undermine the area’s apparent naturalness. As Appendix B to the wilderness evaluation process paper explains, “[a]n area does not have to be pristine or untouched to be suitable for the NWPS” and may contain vegetation treatments, timber harvests, permanently installed vertical structures, areas of historic mining, range improvement areas with minor structural improvements, minor, easily removable recreation developments, ground return utility lines, watershed treatment areas, lands that are adjacent to development or activities that impact opportunities for solitude, structures, dwellings, and relics of past occupation where they are considered part of the historic or cultural landscape, and level 1, decommissioned, unauthorized, or temporary roads – as long as they are substantially unnoticeable.

For example, some narratives rely on the presence of closed system (ML1) roads. For example, the narrative for the Southern Piute Mountains (Polygon 18) on the Sequoia National Forest describes the presence of grazing infrastructure and ML1 roads. The presence of ML1 – which do not disqualify an area from the wilderness inventory – is irrelevant absent an evaluation of whether those roads make the area appear unnatural to the average visitor (which the narrative for the Southern Piute Mountains lacks). Importantly, many ML1 roads may be in the process of passive restoration and/or may be identified for decommissioning. Similarly, the presence of grazing and associated infrastructure – which is commonplace throughout the western national forests, including in designated and recommended wilderness – is irrelevant absent an evaluation of whether the activity and associated improvements appear substantially unnoticeable to the average visitor (which, again, the narrative for the Southern Piute Mountains lacks).

Other narratives rely on the presence of past timber harvests. For example, the narrative for Polygon 1377 Adjacent to Monarch Wilderness on the Sequoia National Forest states that “[t]he

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5 FSH 1909.12, ch. 70, § 72.1(1)(c) (when evaluating apparent naturalness, “[c]onsider such factors as . . . [t]he extent to which improvements included in the area . . . represent a departure from apparent naturalness”).
6 See 16 U.S.C. § 1131(c)(1); FSH 1909.12, ch. 70, § 72.1(1).
7 See Wilderness Evaluation Process Paper, Attachment B: Guidance for Consideration of Evaluated Areas for Recommendation in an Alternative, at 1
8 FSH 1909.12, ch. 70, § 71.22a(1)(a).
southern half of the area has a significant history of timber harvest and associated Level 1 roads and plantations,” but provides no evaluation of how those past timber harvests appears to the average visitor or whether they are substantially noticeable. Decades-old timber harvests with revegetation occurring are often unnoticeable to the average visitor. It is not the presence of past timber harvests, but whether the area appears natural in spite of them and any other human activities or improvements that may be present.

Of the narratives we reviewed, Polygons 63, 73, 227, 315, 304, 357, 539, 577, 586, 646, 772, 781, 819, 821, 1012, 1068, 1179, 1236, 1242, 1258, 1281, 1339, 1378, 1384, 1387, 1391, 1394, 1408, 1426, 1431, and 1432 discuss the presence of past or current human activities or improvements without evaluating whether those activities or improvements appear substantially unnoticeable to the average visitor.

C. Opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation

Some of the narratives suggest that the Forest Service may have improperly conflated the criterion that an area has “outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation.” Both the plain language of the Wilderness Act and the Chapter 70 directives make clear that this is an either/or criterion: “an area only has to possess one or the other” and “does not have to possess outstanding opportunities for both elements, nor does it need to possess outstanding opportunities on every acre.” Thus, the evaluation must consider them separately and cannot aggregate, average, or otherwise conflate the two. Narratives like that for Polygon 539 Adjacent to Dinkey Lakes Wilderness on the Sierra National Forest, however, clearly conflate the two: stating that “[p]rimitive opportunities exist in areas away from existing motorized trails and near the current wilderness boundary,” without identifying which type or types of opportunities are being evaluated.

Of the narratives we reviewed, Polygons 63, 73, 227, 304, 315, 539, 577, 781, 821, 1012, 1339, 1378, 1384, 1387, 1391, 1394, 1408, 1426, and 1432 may have improperly aggregated or co-mingled opportunities for solitude with opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation.

D. Consideration of outside sights and sounds

Many narratives improperly consider outside sights and sounds. Only “pervasive” sights or sounds that impair opportunities for solitude are relevant. For example, the mere presence of a road adjacent to the polygon – which will necessarily be ubiquitous, as polygon boundaries were defined by the location of roads – is irrelevant. To the extent the narratives consider outside sights or sounds, they must include an explanation of why they “are pervasive and influence a visitor’s opportunity for solitude.”

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10 FSH 1909.12, ch. 70, § 72.1(2).
11 FSH 1909.12, ch. 70, § 72.1(2)(a).
12 FSH 1909.12, ch. 70, § 72.1(2)(a).
Most of the narratives we reviewed list potential outside sights or sounds – often associated with the roads that necessarily define the boundaries of the polygon – in the evaluation of opportunities for solitude. The narratives generally do not address whether any sights or sounds associated with roads or other nearby activities, uses, or infrastructure are pervasive and widespread enough to diminish opportunities for solitude throughout a substantial portion of the polygon. For example, the narrative for Peckinpah Creek (Polygon 557) on the Sierra National Forest considers “the potential for the noise from motorized vehicles on adjacent roads and motorized trails traveling across the unit.” The narrative does not address the extent to which this potential noise might be pervasive, or how it would impact a visitor’s opportunities for solitude.

In some instances, the narratives improperly consider outside sights and sounds as an impediment to the area’s naturalness. For example, the narrative for the Southern Piute Mountains (Polygon 18) on the Sequoia National Forest describes a nearby CERCLA site with potential impacts to the view shed. The apparent naturalness criterion looks at “the degree to which the area generally appears to be affected primarily by the forces of nature,” including “[t]he extent to which improvements included in the area . . . represent a departure from apparent naturalness.” The inquiry does not extend to the appearance of surrounding areas outside the polygon boundary.

Of the narratives we reviewed, Polygons 63, 73, 227, 304, 357, 539, 557, 577, 586, 646, 772, 781, 819, 821, 1012, 1068, 1179, 1236, 1242, 1246, 1258, 1281, 1339, 1355, 1357, 1361, 1378, 1384, 1387, 1391, 1394, and 1408 appear to improperly consider outside sights and sounds.

E. Consideration of motorized uses

Most of the narratives we reviewed focus on the presence of motorized uses inside and/or outside the evaluated polygons. While motorized uses may impact an area’s apparent naturalness and/or opportunities for solitude, their presence does not automatically impede wilderness character, as many of the narratives seem to assume. In fact, Congress, the Forest Service, and other agencies have routinely determined that areas with authorized motorized activity possess wilderness characteristics and managed them to maintain their suitability for wilderness designation.

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13 See FSH 1909.12, ch. 70, § 72.1(2) (“pervasive sights and sounds from outside the area” must influence a visitor’s opportunity for solitude, which need not occur on every acre).
14 FSH 1909.12, ch. 70, § 72.1(1)(c) (emphasis added).
15 See, e.g., Public Law No. 96-550, § 103, 94 Stat. 3221 (Dec. 19, 1980) (designating six wilderness study areas in New Mexico National Forests to be managed “to maintain their presently existing wilderness character and potential for inclusion in the [NWPS]: Provided, [t]hat . . . current levels of motorized . . . uses . . . shall be permitted to continue subject to . . . reasonable rules and regulations”); Payette National Forest, Land and Resource Management Plan, ROD-9, III-74, III-82 (2003), available at http://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/payette/landmanagement/planning/?cid=stelprdb5035589 (recommending over 200,000 acres for wilderness designation and permitting existing motorized uses to continue in those areas unless it degrades wilderness values or causes resource damage or user conflicts);
Some narratives consider the mere presence of motorized uses in the area as undermining its naturalness. As described above, absent an evaluation of whether that use would appear substantially unnoticeable to the average visitor, the mere presence of motorized uses is an inappropriate consideration. For example, the narrative for Polygon 539 Adjacent to Dinkey Lakes Wilderness on the Sierra National Forest states “[t]he area is surrounded by an extensive road network and is crossed by the Swamp and Coyote motorized trails” in its evaluation of apparent naturalness. There is no discussion of how the trails or their use would appear to the average visitor. And consideration of the surrounding road network is entirely irrelevant to the evaluation of apparent naturalness, which is limited to the apparent character of the area itself.¹⁶

Many narratives consider the mere presence of motorized uses to impair opportunities for solitude, without an adequate evaluation of whether that use is pervasive and how it influences a visitor’s opportunity for solitude throughout the area.¹⁷ For example, the narrative for Dexter Canyon (Polygon 1068) on the Inyo National Forest notes that “[t]he area is dissected by one motorized trail” and that “[p]roximity to motorized recreation . . . limit[s] opportunities for solitude.” These narratives also typically address motorized uses as an impediment to the ability to manage the area to preserve its wilderness characteristics, as addressed in more detail below.

Of the narratives we reviewed, Polygons 63, 73, 227, 304, 357, 539, 577, 586, 646, 772, 781, 819, 821, 1012, 1068, 1236, 1246, 1281, 1339, 1378, 1384, 1391, 1394, 1408, 1426, and 1432 appear to improperly consider the presence of motorized uses inside or adjacent to the area.

F. Manageability considerations

Chapter 70 lists five factors to consider when evaluating “the degree to which the area may be managed to preserve its wilderness characteristics”: (a) shape and configuration of the area; (b) legally established rights or uses within the area; (c) specific Federal or State laws that may be relevant to availability of the area for wilderness or the ability to manage the area to protect wilderness characteristics; (d) the presence and amount of non-Federal land in the area; and (e) management of adjacent lands.¹⁸ As these factors – which focus on the geographical shape and configuration of the area and any governing legal requirements – highlight, the evaluation is not an appropriate place to consider management trade-offs, which should be analyzed in the DEIS.

¹⁶ See FSH 1909.12, ch. 70, § 72.1(1).
¹⁷ See FSH 1909.12, ch. 70, § 72.1(2)(a).
¹⁸ FSH 1909.12, ch. 70, § 72.1(5).
Most of the narratives we reviewed, however, improperly consider management trade-offs such as whether a polygon may be managed to use or control fire, for livestock grazing, for threatened or endangered species, to eradicate invasive species, or to conduct ecological restoration. For example, the narrative for Pizona-Truman Meadows (Polygon 1339) on the Inyo National Forest highlights the potential need for active management of sage grouse priority habitat and wild horse herds, as well as the illegal use of user-created motorized trails that “are being considered for addition to the forest’s trail system.” Consideration of these sorts of management trade-offs are outside the scope of the wilderness evaluation.

Moreover, many of the management activities listed in the narratives – including grazing, wildlife management (e.g., sage grouse), restoration activities – do not constitute conflicting uses that would necessarily impede wilderness management. Indeed, the Wilderness Act tasks agencies with managing wilderness for a range of public purposes, including recreational, scenic, scientific, educational, conservation, and historical uses. Activities such as ecological restoration and wildfire management may continue if they do not interfere with preservation of wilderness characteristics. In some cases, these activities may in fact increase wilderness character.

Many narratives consider motorized uses as a manageability concern. For example, Polygon 1246 North of Eureka Valley Road on the Inyo National Forest notes the presence of motorized trails, as well as widespread illegal off-highway vehicle use occurring along the western and southern portion of the polygon. Importantly, even authorized motorized uses are not “[l]egally established . . . uses within the area,” which should be interpreted to encompass uses established by law – not to agency planning or implementation decisions like designation of motorized trails in a travel management plan. Instead, consideration of how to balance motorized recreational opportunities with protection of wilderness characteristics is another management trade-off that should be analyzed in the DEIS.

Of the narratives we reviewed, Polygons 63, 73, 227, 304, 315, 357, 539, 577, 586, 646, 772, 781, 819, 821, 1012, 1068, 1179, 1236, 1246, 1258, 1339, 1355, 1357, 1361, 1281, 1378, 1384, 1387, 1391, 1394, 1408, 1426, 1431, and 1432 recite improper manageability considerations.

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20 See, e.g., Wilderness Evaluation Process Paper, Attachment B: Guidance for Consideration of Evaluated Areas for Recommendation in an Alternative, at 1 (“Congress has recognized the need to provide for passive or active restoration in previously modified areas that have wilderness characteristics.”).
21 Such legally established rights or uses might include, for example, rights of access to private land inholdings, see Federal Land Policy & Management Act of 1976, Title V, 16 U.S.C. §§ 1761-1770; mining on patented or unpatented hard rock mining claims, see General Mining Law of 1872, 30 U.S.C. §§ 22, 26; ski area operations pursuant to special use permit, see National Forest Ski Area Permit Act of 1986, 16 U.S.C. § 497b; or American Indian treaty rights, see, e.g., Minnesota v. Mille Lacs Band of Chippewa Indians, 526 U.S. 172, 177, 193-95, 202 (1999) (affirming tribal hunting, fishing, and gathering rights established by treaty).
II. Identifying Areas for DEIS Analysis

Chapter 70 requires that areas be identified for NEPA analysis “[b]ased on the evaluation and input from public participation opportunities.” While we are pleased that the evaluation process paper and narratives have been provided for public input, we are concerned that the deficiencies in the wilderness evaluation identified above and in our previous comment letters will result in areas being improperly excluded from DEIS analysis. More broadly, we are concerned that the Forest Service has not articulated a rational or repeatable process for identifying areas to be brought forward. As we pointed out in our August 28, 2015 letter, the wilderness evaluation process paper does not articulate whether or how the Forest Service weighed and compared the relative wilderness characteristics of each area to inform the determination of which areas or portions of areas to carry forward for analysis. The information released in December 2015 does not appear to address this issue, except to suggest that public feedback will help shape the DEIS alternatives.

Our concern is highlighted by the current proposal of areas to carry forward. For example, all but one of the polygons on the Sierra and Sequoia National Forests currently proposed for inclusion in Alternative C have been reduced in size from the inventoried area, many of them substantially. For example, the Bright Star Wilderness Additions (polygon 1426) on the Sequoia National Forest was reduced from nearly 50,000 acres to less than 19,000 acres in the current proposal for Alternative C, while Devil’s Gulch (Polygon 772) and Shuteye (Polygon 646) on the Sierra National Forest were reduced from nearly 48,000 acres and over 18,000 acres to approximately 20,500 acres and less than 7,000, respectively. These and other areas we recommended for wilderness designation in our supplemental scoping comments – including Polygons 63, 73, 315, 539, 646, 772, 819, 821, 1378, 1384, 1387, 1394, 1408, 1426, and 1431 – have been significantly whittled down without adequate explanation.

While we assume that the Forest Service will provide in the DEIS its rationale for which areas or portions of areas it chose to carry forward, we remain concerned that areas have been whittled down based on improper manageability concerns or other considerations. For example, the wilderness evaluation narrative for the Bright Star Additions improperly focuses on the presence of motorized recreation as an impediment to the area’s manageability. It is unclear whether the 30,000 acres that are not proposed to be carried forward for NEPA analysis were excluded due to this consideration. The wilderness evaluation narrative for Shuteye suggests that removing areas including motorized trails would resolve manageability concerns.

III. NEPA Range of Alternatives

Since May 2015, we have repeatedly raised our concern that the approach of carrying forward for DEIS analysis only a minority of the inventoried areas will result in an unreasonably narrow range of alternatives, in violation of NEPA. The analysis of alternatives under NEPA is the “heart”

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22 FSH 1909.12, ch. 70, § 73.
23 See Wilderness Evaluation FAQ, at 2.
of an EIS. An agency must “[r]igorously explore and objectively evaluate all reasonable alternatives” to a proposed action. Consistent with NEPA’s basic policy objective to protect the environment, this includes more environmentally protective alternatives. “The existence of a viable but unexamined alternative renders an [EIS] inadequate.” The “touchstone” of the inquiry is “whether an EIS’s selection and discussion of alternatives fosters informed decision-making and informed public participation.”

While we are pleased to see that the Forest Service is proposing to carry forward additional acreage in Alternative C, the current proposal is still inadequate to ensure a reasonable range of alternatives and to foster informed decision-making and public participation. Alternative C would currently include only 495,366 acres of potential recommended wilderness – less than 32% of the final inventoried acreage. Binding Ninth Circuit precedent has rejected as unduly narrow a range of alternatives that would have designated a maximum of 33% of roadless acreage as recommended wilderness.

We have repeatedly recommended solutions to fix the range of alternatives problem and hope that the Forest Service will implement those recommendations in the DEIS. First, one alternative should include all, or the vast majority of, the 1.5 million acres of inventoried/evaluated areas. This would ensure an adequate range of alternatives and a robust analysis of the trade-offs and impacts associated with recommending most (if not all) of the inventoried areas. Given the significant problems with the forests’ wilderness evaluation and Chapter 70 process to date, this alternative would also better facilitate additional changes to the evaluation in response to public input during this comment period and on the DEIS and reduce

25 Id. § 1502.14(a). See also 42 U.S.C. § 4332(2)(E) (agencies must “study, develop, and describe appropriate alternatives to recommended courses of action in any proposal which involves unresolved conflicts concerning alternative uses of available resources”).
26 40 C.F.R. § 1500.2(e) (agencies must “[u]se the NEPA process to identify and assess reasonable alternatives to proposed actions that will avoid or minimize adverse effects of these actions upon the quality of the human environment”). See also, e.g., Kootenai Tribe of Idaho v. Veneman, 313 F.3d 1094, 1121-22 (9th Cir. 2002) (citing cases), abrogated on other grounds by The Wilderness Soc’y v. U.S. Forest Serv., 630 F.3d 1173, 1178-80 (9th Cir. 2011) (en banc).
27 Mont. Wilderness Ass’n v. Connell, 725 F.3d 988, 1004 (9th Cir. 2013) (quotations and citation omitted).
28 Id. at 1005 (quotations and citation omitted).
29 California v. Block, 690 F.2d 753, 765 (9th Cir. 1982).
30 See Council on Environmental Quality, NEPA’s Forty Most Asked Questions, 46 Fed. Reg. 18,026 (Mar. 23, 1981) (“When there are potentially a very large number of alternatives, only a reasonable number of examples, covering the full spectrum of alternatives, must be analyzed and compared in the EIS. An appropriate series of alternatives might include dedicating 0, 10, 30, 50, 70, 90, or 100 percent of the Forest to wilderness.”); California, 690 F.2d at 765, 768-69 (in addition to considering an alternative that allocated 100% of inventoried roadless areas to wilderness, “it was unreasonable for the Forest Service to overlook the obvious alternative of allocating more than a third of the RARE II acreage to a Wilderness designation”); cf. Mont. Wilderness Ass’n, 725 F.3d at 1004-05 (range of alternatives for national monument plan that would have opened between 0 and 10 (the total number existing) backcountry airstrips, including several mid-range alternatives, was reasonable).
the risk that the Forest Service will need to conduct supplemental NEPA in order to adequately respond to issues raised by the public.

Second, another alternative should include all the areas TWS and other groups have recommended for wilderness designation during scoping and other relevant public participation opportunities. For example, our November 17, 2014 supplemental scoping comments recommended 233,111 acres on the Sierra National Forest and 248,526 acres on the Sequoia National Forest for wilderness designation. In total, we have recommended approximately 625,130 acres across the three forests – or about 40% of the final inventoried acreage – for wilderness designation and provided detailed information documenting the areas’ wilderness characteristics. Under NEPA, the Forest Service is obligated to consider and analyze this reasonable proposal as an alternative. 31

IV. Suitable Uses and Management of Recommended Wilderness

The Forest Service has asked for “input regarding suitable uses and management of recommended wilderness.” The Forest Service Manual establishes that the standard for allowing non-conforming uses in recommended wilderness is that they may not reduce the area’s wilderness potential. 32 The Forest Service Handbook directs that the Forest Service may allow non-conforming uses so long as they protect and maintain the social and ecological characteristics that form the basis of the wilderness recommendation. 33 In general, we believe that non-conforming uses should be prohibited from recommended wilderness. However, if the Forest Service is considering allowing motorized recreation or other non-conforming uses within recommended wilderness areas, it must provide adequate assurance that both the Forest Service Manual and Handbook requirements are met.

Specifically, if the forest supervisors choose to allow non-conforming uses in recommended wilderness, they must:

- Document in detail the social and ecological characteristics that form the basis of the wilderness recommendation in the administrative record;
- Provide a reasoned and fact-based explanation in the administrative record for why allowing the uses will not reduce the wilderness potential; and
- Establish standards that ensure that wilderness potential is not reduced as a result of allowing the non-conforming uses. This includes, but is not limited to: 1) a standard requiring monitoring of the social and ecological characteristics that form the basis of the wilderness recommendation, and mandatory adaptive measures if the wilderness potential is found to be diminished, and 2) a standard requiring the Forest Service to consider monitoring data submitted by the public.

31 See Mont. Wilderness Ass’n, 725 F.3d 1004 (“The existence of a viable but unexamined alternative renders an [EIS] inadequate.” (quotations and citation omitted)).
32 FSM 1923.03(3) (“Any area recommended for wilderness or wilderness study designation is not available for any use or activity that may reduce the wilderness potential of an area.”).
33 FSH 1909.12, ch. 70, § 74.1.
V. Conclusion

We are pleased that the Forest Service has attempted to correct some of the public participation and process deficiencies we have previously identified. We are concerned, however, that the wilderness evaluation and current proposal for areas to carry forward for NEPA analysis remains flawed. The Forest Service should correct the identified deficiencies in its application of the evaluation criteria, and utilize the corrected evaluations and input from the public to identify areas or portions of areas to carry forward for NEPA analysis. In doing so, the agency must ensure a reasonable range of alternatives that encompass proposals submitted by the public and at least one alternative that would recommend for wilderness designation all or a significant proportion of the inventoried and evaluated areas.

Thank you for your consideration, and please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions.

Sincerely,

Alison Flint
Counsel and Planning Specialist
The Wilderness Society

Susan Britting, Ph.D.
Executive Director
Sierra Forest Legacy

Frances A. Hunt
Eastern Sierra Organizer
Sierra Club

Steve Evans
Wild & Scenic River Consultant
Friends of the River
Ryan Henson  
Senior Policy Director  
CalWild (California Wilderness Coalition)

Alan Carlton  
Sierra Nevada Team Leader  
Sierra Club

Greg Suba  
Conservation Director  
California Native Plant Society

Trudy Tucker  
National Forest Chair  
Tehipite Chapter, Sierra Club

Malcolm Clark  
Range of Light Group (Toiyabe Chapter)  
Sierra Club

Don Rivenes  
Executive Director  
Forest Issues Group

Patricia Puterbaugh  
Lassen Forest Preservation Group

Lisa Cutting  
Eastern Sierra Policy Director  
Mono Lake Committee

SFL et al. Comments on the DEIS for draft forest plans on the Inyo, Sequoia, and Sierra national forests (August 25, 2016)
Michael J. Connor, Ph.D.
California Director
Western Watersheds Project

Joe Fontaine
Kern-Kaweah Chapter
Sierra Club

Stan Van Velsor, Ph.D.
Senior Regional Representative
The Wilderness Society
November 17, 2014

Kevin Elliott  
Forest Supervisor  
Sequoia National Forest  
1839 South Newcomb Street  
Porterville, CA 93257  
1600

Subject: Recommendations for the management of the roadless areas in the Sequoia National Forest for the Land Management Plan revision process

Dear Mr. Elliott:

The following input is meant to supplement the scoping comments that The Wilderness Society and California Wilderness Coalition submitted previously on the Sequoia National Forest’s Land Management Plan revision process.

After carefully reviewing the areas included in the US Forest Service’s (USFS) Wilderness Inventory, we request that the Sequoia National Forest propose to manage its roadless lands in the Land Management Plan revision in the manner summarized in the following matrix. Our reasons for offering these recommendations are included in the pages below. Please note that all of the areas described below can be managed as either Recommended Wilderness or Backcountry without closing any legally-open roads or motorized trails (the only exception occurs in the Piute Mountains where the status of the existing routes in the area is uncertain because the USFS has still not completed its travel management planning process). Please also note that for the Recommended Wilderness areas, we have taken the USFS’ Wilderness Inventory polygons and removed all significant disturbances such as large clearcuts, large plantations, water diversions, closed roads that still leave significant scars on the landscape, reservoirs, powerlines, areas of major mining damage and other human-caused impacts that are incompatible with Wilderness values when they dominate the landscape.
Our recommendations demonstrate that it is feasible to manage many of the Sequoia National Forest’s roadless areas as either Recommended Wilderness or Backcountry without creating substantial conflicts with off-highway vehicle recreation or other important activities. Our recommendations also demonstrate that it is possible to draft boundaries for Recommended Wilderness areas that do not include excessively disturbed lands. We encourage you to include these recommendations in the preferred alternative in the Sequoia National Forest’s forthcoming draft Land Management Plan.

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<td><strong>22,087</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following narratives describe each of the proposed Recommended Wilderness areas and Backcountry zones.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Ryan Henson
Senior Policy Director
California Wilderness Coalition
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BRIGHT STAR ADDITIONS PROPOSED RECOMMENDED WILDERNESS
USFS WILDERNESS INVENTORY POLYGON NUMBER: 1426
INVENTORIED ROADLESS AREA NAME (if applicable): Staff
ACRES: 49,759
APPARENT NATURALNESS ACCORDING TO AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHS AND/OR FIELD SURVEYS: While the area is primarily natural in appearance, it does have a long mining history that has resulted in the existence of several minor Jeep trails and lesser routes. Such disturbances are quite common in the NWPS, particularly in the California desert.
CALIFORNIA NATURAL DIVERSITY DATABASE PLANT AND ANIMAL SPECIES: Adobe yampah, alkali mariposa-lily, American badger, Bacigalupi's yampah, Bendire's thrasher, Breedlove's buckwheat, California androsace, California spotted owl, coast horned lizard, Comstock's blue butterfly, Death Valley sandmat, fisher, foothill yellow-legged frog, fragile pentachaeta, golden eagle, grey-leaved violet, inland gilia, Kelso Creek monkeyflower, Kern Canyon clarkia, Kern Canyon slender salamander, Kern County evening-primrose, Kern County milk-vetch, Kern red-winged blackbird, Kern River evening-primrose, large-flowered nemacladus, limestone dudleya, lodgepole chipmunk, long-legged myotis, Mojave paintbrush, Mojave tarplant, Mount Pinos larkspur, northern goshawk, pallid bat, Palmer's mariposa-lily, Palmer's spineflower, Parish's checkerbloom, Piute cypress, Piute Mountains jewelflower, Piute Mountains navarretia, prairie falcon, rose-flowered larkspur, round-leaved filaree, San Bernardino aster, San Joaquin pocket mouse, Shevock's golden-aster, Sierra Nevada monkeyflower, Tehachapi monardella, Tehachapi Mountain silverspot butterfly, Townsend's big-eared bat, Tracy's erastrum, Transverse Range phacelia, tricolored blackbird, unexpected larkspur, western pond turtle, white pygmy-poppy, willow flycatcher and yellow-eared pocket mouse.
IMPORTANT VALUES AND FEATURES: Four different bioregions come together in this region, including the Sierra Nevada, Transverse Range, Mojave Desert and the Central Valley. Plant and animal species are found living together here that mingle together nowhere else on Earth. The area offers unique opportunities to study rapid evolution and ecosystem development. The region offers an outstanding opportunity to protect the kind of diverse transitional habitat that will become increasingly important in an era of climate change. The area contains many important habitats that are very poorly-represented in both the NWPS and in designated Wilderness in the Sequoia NF. The Bright Star Additions have been included in Wilderness legislation in the past sponsored by Senator Barbara Boxer.
NOTES: While we normally strive to exclude legally-open vehicle routes from our Wilderness proposals, we understand that this area is currently undergoing a travel management process. We therefore do not know which routes to exclude. Please note that the sights and sounds of nearby roads and motorized trails has no bearing on the natural character or wilderness character of this roadless area. Such sights and sounds are common in the NWPS.
MAP: Polygon 1426 is shown in blue, and the Bright Star Wilderness is shown in yellow.
Bright Star Additions Proposed Recommended Wilderness (in blue)
CANNELL PROPOSED RECOMMENDED WILDERNESS

USFS WILDERNESS INVENTORY POLYGON NUMBER: 1384

INVENTORIED ROADLESS AREA NAME (if applicable): Cannell

ACRES: 31,472

APPARENT NATURALNESS ACCORDING TO AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHS AND/OR FIELD SURVEYS: As drawn by the USFS, Polygon 1384 contains clearcuts, roads, mines, water diversions, OHV routes, plantations and many other developments. However, as redrawn by conservationists (see below), the remainder of Polygon 1384 is natural in appearance except for a small number of closed Jeep trails and very minor logging scars. The remainder of the area is free of any designated vehicle routes according to the MVUM.

CALIFORNIA NATURAL DIVERSITY DATABASE PLANT AND ANIMAL SPECIES: Alkali mariposa-lily, American peregrine falcon, bald eagle, bluish spike-moss, calico monkeyflower, California condor, California spotted owl, Clokey's cryptantha, coast horned lizard, Cooper's hawk, crowned muilla, cut-leaf checkerbloom, Fairview slender salamander, few-flowered eriastrum, fisher, golden eagle, grey-leaved violet, Hoover's eriastrum, Kelso Creek monkeyflower, Kern Canyon clarkia, Kern ceanothus, Kern County evening-primrose, Kern Plateau salamander, Kern red-winged blackbird, Kern River evening-primrose, Kernville poppy, lark sparrow, Lawrence's goldfinch, Lewis' woodpecker, limestone dudleya, Mason's neststraw, Mojave tarplant, Mount Pinos sooty grouse, Nine Mile Canyon phacelia, northern goshawk, northern harrier, northern sagebrush lizard, Nuttall's woodpecker, Onyx Peak bedstraw, osprey, Pacific marten, pallid bat, Piute cypress, prairie falcon, prairie wedge grass, red-breasted sapsucker, redhead, relictual slender salamander, rose-flowered larkspur, rufous hummingbird, San Emidio blue butterfly, San Joaquin kit fox, San Joaquin pocket mouse, sharp-shinned hawk, Shevock's copper moss, short-bracted bird's-beak, Sierra Nevada monkeyflower, Sierra Nevada mountain beaver, Sierra Nevada red fox, Sierra Nevada yellow-legged frog, slender clarkia, southern Sierra woolly sunflower, southwestern willow flycatcher, summer tanager, The Needles buckwheat, Townsend's big-eared bat, Tracy's eriastrum, Transverse Range phacelia, tricolored blackbird, Tulare grasshopper mouse, Virginia's warbler, western pond turtle, western yellow-billed cuckoo, white pygmy-poppy, wine-colored tufa moss, yellow warbler, yellow-breasted chat and yellow-headed blackbird.

IMPORTANT VALUES AND FEATURES: The area contains several important low-elevation habitats, including oak savannah, grasslands, old-growth conifer forest and riparian habitat. All of these low-elevation habitats are very poorly-represented in both the NWPS and in designated Wilderness in the Sequoia NF. Visitors to the area are greeted with expansive views of the Kern Plateau.

NOTES: Please note that the sights and sounds of nearby roads and motorized trails has no bearing on the natural character or wilderness character of this roadless area. Such sights and sounds are common in the NWPS.

MAP: Polygon 1384 is shown in red, below. The portion of Polygon 1384 that we would like to see recommended for Wilderness designation is shaded.
Cannell Proposed Recommended Wilderness (hatched)
CHICO PROPOSED RECOMMENDED WILDERNESS

USFS WILDERNESS INVENTORY POLYGON NUMBER: 1408

INVENTORIED ROADLESS AREA NAME (if applicable): Chico

ACRES: 47,843

APPARENT NATURALNESS ACCORDING TO AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHS AND/OR FIELD SURVEYS: As redrawn by conservationists, Polygon 1408 is natural in appearance except for a small number of closed Jeep trails, small mining scars and dozer lines from fire-suppression activities. The area is free of any designated vehicle routes according to the MVUM.

CALIFORNIA NATURAL DIVERSITY DATABASE PLANT AND ANIMAL SPECIES: Alkali mariposa-lily, American peregrine falcon, bald eagle, bluish spike-moss, Bolander’s bruchia, California condor, California spotted owl, California wolverine, Call’s angelica, coast horned lizard, cut-leaf checkerbloom, delicate bluecup, Fairview slender salamander, few-flowered eriаstrum, fisher, Fresno ceanothus, golden eagle, Greenhorn fritillary, grey-leaved violet, Kern Canyon clarkia, Kern ceanothus, Kern Plateau salamander, Kernville poppy, Lawrence’s goldfinch, Lewis’ woodpecker, limestone dudleya, lodgepole chipmunk, marsh claytonia, Mojave phacelia, Mojave tarplant, Mount Pinsos sooty grouse, Muir’s tarplant, Nine Mile Canyon phacelia, northern goshawk, northern sagebrush lizard, osprey, Pacific marten, pine fritillary, Piute cypress, prairie falcon, prairie wedge grass, red-breasted sapsucker, relictual slender salamander, rose-flowered larkspur, San Joaquin kit fox, sharp-shinned hawk, Shevock’s copper moss, Shirley Meadows star tulip, short-bracted bird’s-beak, Sierra Nevada monkeyflower, Sierra Nevada mountain beaver, Sierra Nevada red fox, Sierra Nevada yellow-legged frog, southern Sierra woolly sunflower, southern mountain yellow-legged frog, The Needles buckwheat, Townsend’s big-eared bat, Tracy’s eriаstrum, Transverse Range phacelia, unexpected larkspur, western pond turtle, white pygmy-poppy and wine-colored tufa moss.

IMPORTANT VALUES AND FEATURES: The area contains several important low-elevation habitats, including oak savannah, grasslands, old-growth conifer forest and riparian habitat. All of these low-elevation habitats are very poorly-represented in both the NWPS and in designated Wilderness in the Sequoia NF. Three plant species live here and nowhere else on Earth. Visitors to the area are greeted with expansive views of the Kern Plateau. The Kern is one of the most popular fishing and whitewater boating streams in the United States. Protecting this area will help to maintain that high-quality recreational experience.

NOTES: Polygon 1408 includes logged areas, plantations, extensive mining scars, Jeep trails, tree plantations and other disturbances. We have redrawn the polygon to exclude the vast majority of these disturbances. The Kern River is the new eastern boundary for the polygon. Please note that the sights and sounds of nearby roads and motorized trails has no bearing on the natural character or wilderness character of this roadless area. Such sights and sounds are common in the NWPS.

MAP: Polygon 1408 is shown in red, below. Polygon 99 is in pink to the west. The portion of Polygon 1408 that we would like to see recommended for Wilderness designation is shaded.
DOMELAND ADDITIONS PROPOSED RECOMMENDED WILDERNESS
USFS WILDERNESS INVENTORY POLYGON NUMBER: 1394 and 1431
INVENTORYED ROADLESS AREA NAME (if applicable): Domeland Additions and Woodpecker
ACRES: 45,282 (southern unit: 20,981, eastern unit: 20,906, northern unit: 3,395)
APPARENT NATURALNESS ACCORDING TO AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHS AND/OR FIELD SURVEYS: As drawn by the USFS, Polygons 1394 and 1431 contain clearcuts, roads, OHV routes, plantations and many other developments. However, as redrawn by conservationists (see below), the remainder of Polygons 1394 and 1431 are natural in appearance except for a small number of closed Jeep trails, very minor logging scars and a very small number of recovering skid trails. The RW is in three units, one in the south, one west of the Domeland Wilderness and one in the north. All three border the existing Wilderness. The remainder of the polygons are free of any designated vehicle routes according to the MVUM.
CALIFORNIA NATURAL DIVERSITY DATABASE PLANT AND ANIMAL SPECIES: Alpine dusty maidens, American badger, Blandow's bog moss, California condor, California spotted owl, California wolverine, Cooper's hawk, cut-leaf checkerbloom, few-flowered eriustrum, field ivesia, fisher, golden eagle, Greenhorn fritillary, grey-leaved violet, hidden rockcress, Kern ceanothus, Kern Plateau salamander, limestone dudleya, Mojave tarplant, Murir's tarplant, northern goshawk, northern sagebrush lizard, Onyx Peak bedstraw, pinyon rockcress, sharp-shinned hawk, short-bracted bird's-beak, Sierra Nevada red fox, southern mountain yellow-legged frog, The Needles buckwheat, Transverse Range phacelia, Tulare County buckwheat, Tulare County rockcress, Twisselmann's nemacladus and Yosemite lewisia.
IMPORTANT VALUES AND FEATURES: The area has astonishing botanical diversity, including red fir forest, foxtail pine, wet meadows, dry meadows, riparian habitat, chaparral and oak woodlands. The area also contains several species endemic to Sirretta Peak, which is the highest mountain on the Kern Plateau that makes up part of the Great Western Divide. The tributaries of Fish Creek contain golden trout, and the roadless area includes one of only three spotted owl nesting sites in the Kern Plateau.
NOTES: Please note that the sights and sounds of nearby roads and motorized trails has no bearing on the natural or wilderness character of this roadless area. Such sights and sounds are common in the NWPS.
MAP: Polygon 1394 is shown in red, below. The two portions of Polygon 1394 that we would like to see recommended for Wilderness designation are shaded. The RW is in three units.

Domeland Additions Proposed Recommended Wilderness, southern unit (hatched)
Domeland Additions Proposed Recommended Wilderness, western unit (hatched)
Domeland Additions Proposed Recommended Wilderness, northern unit (hatched)
GOLDEN TROUT ADDITIONS PROPOSED RECOMMENDED WILDERNESS
USFS WILDERNESS INVENTORY POLYGON NUMBER: 1387 and 1432
INVENTORYED ROADLESS AREA NAME (if applicable): Rincon
ACRES: 39,890 (southern unit: 9,166, northern unit: 28,722, Osa unit: 875, Blackrock unit: 1,132)
APPARENT NATURALNESS ACCORDING TO AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHS AND/OR FIELD SURVEYS: As drawn by the USFS, Polygons 1387 and 1432 contain clearcuts, roads, OHV routes, plantations and many other developments. However, as redrawn by conservationists (see below), the remainder of Polygons 1387 and 1432 are natural in appearance except for a small number of closed Jeep trails, very minor logging scars and a limited number of recovering skid trails. The RW is in four units. The RW is free of any designated vehicle routes according to the MVUM.
IMPORTANT VALUES AND FEATURES: This area is part of the largest complex of unroaded lands in the Sierra Nevada. It has great ecological diversity due to its wildness, size, and elevations ranging from 3,000 feet along the Kern River to almost 10,000 feet atop Lookout Mountain. The RW contains critically-important oak woodlands, old-growth mixed conifer forests and other ecosystems that are poorly represented in both the NWPS and in the Sequoia NF. Protecting this area would preserve a continuous uninterrupted transition of ecosystems from the drier brushy areas along the North Fork Kern River to the conifer forests of the Kern Plateau. Protecting such transition zones is especially important during a time of climate change. Durrwood Creek is an untouched watershed that contains golden trout. The proposed additions are also summer range for deer migrating from Sequoia-Kings Canyon National Park.
NOTES: Please note that the sights and sounds of nearby roads and motorized trails has no bearing on the natural character or wilderness character of this roadless area. Such sights and sounds are common in the NWPS. The second unit at 9,166 acres is still of sufficient size to meet Wilderness criteria.
MAP: Polygons 1387 and 1432 are shown in red, below. The portion of Polygon 1387 that we would like to see recommended for Wilderness designation is shaded.
Golden Trout Additions Proposed Recommended Wilderness (hatched)
Golden Trout Additions Proposed Recommended Wilderness (hatched)
LIGHTNER PEAK PROPOSED RECOMMENDED WILDERNESS  
USFS WILDERNESS INVENTORY POLYGON NUMBER: 73 (eastern portion)  
INVENTORIED ROADLESS AREA NAME (if applicable): A remaining fragment of the Mill Creek IRA  
ACRES: 6,365  
APPARENT NATURALNESS ACCORDING TO AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHS AND/OR FIELD SURVEYS: As drawn by the USFS, Polygon 73 is bisected by OHV routes and other disturbances. As redrawn by conservationists (see map below), the area is undisturbed except for a minor bulldozer line in Section 8. The remainder of Polygon 73 is free of any designated vehicle routes according to the MVUM.  
CALIFORNIA NATURAL DIVERSITY DATABASE PLANT AND ANIMAL SPECIES: Adobe yampah, Baja navarretia, bald eagle, Bell's sage sparrow, calico monkeyflower, California spotted owl, coast horned lizard, Coast Range newt, fringed myotis, golden eagle, Greenhorn fritillary, hoary bat, Kern Canyon clarkia, Kern Canyon slender salamander, Kern ceanothus, Kern Plateau bird's-beak, Kern primrose sphinx moth, Kern River evening-primrose, Kernville poppy, limestone dudleya, merlin, Mexican mosquito fern, northern goshawk, pale-yellow layia, pallid bat, Palmer's mariposa-lily, Piute Mountains cuckoo wasp, Piute Mountains jewelflower, Piute Mountains navarretia, relicual slender salamander, rose-flowered larkspur, San Joaquin kit fox, San Joaquin Pocket Mouse, Shevock's golden-aster, Sierra Nevada monkeyflower, southern mountain yellow-legged frog, southwestern willow flycatcher, sylvan microseris, Townsend's big-eared bat, Tracy's eriastrum, Transverse Range phacelia, tricolored blackbird, western mastiff bat, western small-footed myotis, yellow-blotched salamander and Yuma myotis.  
IMPORTANT VALUES AND FEATURES: Oak savannah, grasslands, old-growth conifer forest and riparian habitat. All of these low-elevation habitats are very poorly-represented in both the NWPS and in designated Wilderness in the Sequoia NF.  
NOTES: Polygon 66 includes OHV routes 31E78 and 32E51. We recommend making OHV route 31E78 the western boundary of the RW and route 32E51 the eastern boundary of the RW. Please note that the sights and sounds of nearby roads and motorized trails has no bearing on the natural or wilderness character of this roadless area. Such sights and sounds are common in the NWPS.  
MAP: Polygon 66 is shown in red, below. Polygon 63 is in pink. The portion of Polygon 66 that we would like to see recommended for Wilderness designation under the name of “Lightner Peak” is shaded.
Lightner Peak Proposed Recommended Wilderness (hatched)
LU CAS CREEK PROPOSED RECOMMENDED WILDERNESS
USFS WILDERNESS INVENTORY POLYGON NUMBER: 63
INVENTORIED ROADLESS AREA NAME (if applicable): A remaining fragment of the Mill Creek IRA
ACRES: 5,221
APPARENT NATURALNESS ACCORDING TO AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHS AND/OR FIELD SURVEYS: Minor bulldozer line in Sections 15-17. The area is otherwise natural in appearance. The polygon is free of any designated vehicle routes according to the MVUM.
CALIFORNIA NATURAL DIVERSITY DATABASE PLANT AND ANIMAL SPECIES: Bakersfield cactus, bald eagle, calico monkeyflower, California spotted owl, Comanche Point layia, golden eagle, Greenhorn fritillary, Inyo Mountains slender salamander, Kern Canyon slender salamander, Nine Mile Canyon phacelia, northern goshawk, relictual slender salamander, rose-flowered larkspur, Shevock's golden-aster, Sierra Nevada monkeyflower, slender clarkia and western mastiff bat.
IMPORTANT VALUES AND FEATURES: Oak savannah, grasslands, small pockets of old-growth conifer forest and riparian habitat. All of these low-elevation habitats are very poorly-represented in both the NWPS and in designated Wilderness in the Sequoia NF.
NOTES: A portion of Road 28S08 appears to be included in the roadless polygon by mistake. The RW boundary should be adjusted to exclude this road. Please note that the sights and sounds of nearby roads and motorized trails has no bearing on the natural character or wilderness character of this roadless area. Such sights and sounds are common in the NWPS.
MAP: Polygon 63 is shown in red, below. We would like to see it managed as RW under the name “Lucas Creek,” except for the portion of Road 28S08 that appears to be included in the polygon by mistake.
LUMREAU CREEK PROPOSED BACKCOUNTRY AREA

USFS WILDERNESS INVENTORY POLYGON NUMBER: 1420

INVENTORIED ROADLESS AREA NAME (if applicable): N/A

ACRES: 5,190

APPARENT NATURALNESS ACCORDING TO AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHS AND/OR FIELD SURVEYS: Extensive network of closed roads with tree plantations and other disturbances in Sections 11-14. Otherwise natural in appearance. Free of any designated vehicle routes according to the MVUM.

CALIFORNIA NATURAL DIVERSITY DATABASE PLANT AND ANIMAL SPECIES: Bald eagle, California spotted owl, Call's angelica, delicate bluecup, fisher, Greenhorn fritillary, Greenhorn Mountains slender salamander, gregarious slender salamander, Kern Canyon clarkia, lodgepole chipmunk, Mojave tarplant, northern goshawk, oak-leaved nemophila, pine fritillary, Piute cypress, rose-flowered larkspur, Shirley Meadows star-tulip, short-bracted bird's-beak, Sierra marten, Sierra Nevada monkeyflower, slender clarkia, southern Sierra woolly sunflower, Tracy’s eriastrum and Transverse Range phacelia.

IMPORTANT VALUES AND FEATURES: Oak savannah, grasslands, old-growth conifer forest and riparian habitat. It is very important that these low-elevation habitats be protected due to the fact that they are very poorly-represented in both the NWPS and in designated Wilderness in the Sequoia NF.

NOTES: We are only proposing that the northern portion of the polygon be managed as Backcountry, starting along Lumreau Creek in Section 13. The southern “tail” of the polygon is too narrow and extensively disturbed.

MAP: Polygon 1420 is shown in red, below. The portion of Polygon 1420 that we would like to see managed as Backcountry under the name of “Lumreau Creek” is shaded.
MILL CREEK PROPOSED RECOMMENDED WILDERNESS

USFS WILDERNESS INVENTORY POLYGON NUMBER: 73 (western portion)

INVENTORIED ROADLESS AREA NAME (if applicable): A remaining fragment of the Mill Creek IRA

ACRES: 6,263

APPARENT NATURALNESS ACCORDING TO AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHS AND/OR FIELD SURVEYS: As drawn by the USFS, Polygon 73 is bisected by OHV routes and other disturbances. As redrawn by conservationists (see map below), the area is undisturbed except for a minor bulldozer line in Sections 9-10. The portion of Polygon 73 shown below is free of any designated vehicle routes according to the MVUM.

CALIFORNIA NATURAL DIVERSITY DATABASE PLANT AND ANIMAL SPECIES: Adobe yampah, Baja navarretia, bald eagle, Bell's sage sparrow, calico monkeyflower, California spotted owl, coast horned lizard, Coast Range newt, fringed myotis, golden eagle, Greenhorn fritillary, hoary bat, Kern Canyon clarkia, Kern Canyon slender salamander, Kern ceanothus, Kern Plateau bird's-beak, Kern primrose sphinx moth, Kern River evening-primrose, Kernville poppy, limestone dudleya, merlin, Mexican mosquito fern, northern goshawk, pale-yellow layia, pallid bat, Palmer's mariposa-lily, Piute Mountains cuckoo wasp, Piute Mountains jewelflower, Piute Mountains navarretia, relictual slender salamander, rose-flowered larkspur, San Joaquin kit fox, San Joaquin Pocket Mouse, Shevock's golden-aster, Sierra Nevada monkeyflower, southern mountain yellow-legged frog, southwestern willow flycatcher, sylvan microseris, Townsend's big-eared bat, Tracy's eriustrum, Transverse Range phacelia, tricolored blackbird, western mastiff bat, western small-footed myotis, yellow-blotched salamander and Yuma myotis.

IMPORTANT VALUES AND FEATURES: Oak savannah, grasslands, old-growth conifer forest and riparian habitat. All of these low-elevation habitats are very poorly-represented in both the NWPS and in designated Wilderness in the Sequoia NF.

NOTES: Polygon 73 includes OHV route 31E78. We recommend making the OHV route the eastern boundary of the RW. Please note that the sights and sounds of nearby roads and motorized trails has no bearing on the natural character or wilderness character of this roadless area. Such sights and sounds are common in the NWPS.

MAP: Polygon 73 is shown in red, below. Polygon 63 is in pink. The portion of Polygon 73 that we would like to see recommended for Wilderness designation under the name of “Mill Creek” is shaded.
MILL CREEK PROPOSED RECOMMENDED WILDERNESS (hatched)
OAT MOUNTAIN PROPOSED RECOMMENDED WILDERNESS

USFS WILDERNESS INVENTORY POLYGON NUMBER: 227 (northern and western portions)

INVENTORIED ROADLESS AREA NAME (if applicable): Oat Mountain

ACRES: 10,992

APPARENT NATURALNESS ACCORDING TO AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHS AND/OR FIELD SURVEYS: As drawn by the USFS, Polygon 227 includes clearcuts, private land, roads, OHV routes and other developments. As redrawn by conservationists (see map below), the area only includes a minor bulldozer line in Section 26 west of Lone Pine Canyon. The portion of Polygon 227 shown below is free of any designated vehicle routes according to the MVUM.

CALIFORNIA NATURAL DIVERSITY DATABASE PLANT AND ANIMAL SPECIES: American manna grass, American peregrine falcon, bald eagle, Berry's morning-glory, California spotted owl, Call's angelica, elongate copper moss, fisher, flammulated owl, foothill yellow-legged frog, golden eagle, great gray owl, Kaweah monkeyflower, Kings River buckwheat, limestone dudleya, Madera leptosiphon, osprey, Sierra Nevada red fox, southern Sierra woolly sunflower, streambank spring beauty, thread-leaved beakseed, Tompkins' sedge, Townsend's big-eared bat, valley elderberry longhorn beetle and western pond turtle.

IMPORTANT VALUES AND FEATURES: Oak savannah, grasslands, old-growth conifer forest and riparian habitat. All of these low-elevation habitats are very poorly-represented in both the NWPS and in designated Wilderness in the Sequoia NF. The area provides important winter habitat for deer.

NOTES: Please note that the sights and sounds of nearby roads, motorized trails and recreation on Pine Flat Reservoir has no bearing on the natural character or wilderness character of this roadless area. Such sights and sounds are common in the NWPS.

MAP: Polygon 227 is shown in pink, below. The portion of Polygon 227 that we would like to see recommended for Wilderness designation is shaded.
SATURDAY PEAK PROPOSED BACKCOUNTRY AREA
USFS WILDERNESS INVENTORY POLYGON NUMBER: 66
INVENTORIED ROADLESS AREA NAME (if applicable): A portion of the Greenhorn IRA
ACRES: 7,545

APPARENT NATURALNESS ACCORDING TO AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHS AND/OR FIELD SURVEYS: The area has a very extensive network of closed roads, but it is otherwise natural in appearance. As redrawn by conservationists, the area is free of any designated vehicle routes according to the MVUM.

CALIFORNIA NATURAL DIVERSITY DATABASE PLANT AND ANIMAL SPECIES: American badger, Bakersfield cactus, bald eagle, blunt-nosed leopard lizard, burrowing owl, calico monkeyflower, California jewelflower, California spotted owl, Comanche Point layia, cottony buckwheat, fringed myotis, golden eagle, Greenhorn fritillary, gregarious slender salamander, Kern Canyon slender salamander, loggerhead shrike, monarch butterfly, Mount Pinos larkspur, oil neststraw, pale-yellow layia, relictual slender salamander, rose-flowered larkspur, round-leaved filaree, San Joaquin adobe sunburst, San Joaquin kit fox, San Joaquin woollythreads, Shevock's golden-aster, short-eared owl Sierra Nevada monkeyflower, slender clarkia, streambank spring beauty, striped adobe-lily, sylvan microseris, Townsend's big-eared bat, Tracy's eriastrum, tricolored blackbird, western mastiff bat and western pond turtle.

IMPORTANT VALUES AND FEATURES: Grassland, oak woodlands and riparian habitat. It is very important that these low-elevation habitats be protected due to the fact that they are very poorly-represented in both the NWPS and in designated Wilderness in the Sequoia NF.

NOTES: Polygon 66 includes OHV Route 31E76 but we have redrawn the area to exclude the route.

MAP: Polygon 66 is shown in red, below. The portion of Polygon 66 that we would like to see managed as Backcountry under the name of “Saturday Peak” is shaded.
**SOUTH SIERRA ADDITIONS PROPOSED RECOMMENDED WILDERNESS**

**USFS WILDERNESS INVENTORY POLYGON NUMBER:** 1458

**INVENTORIED ROADLESS AREA NAME (if applicable):** South Sierra

**ACRES:** 5,439 (northern unit: 2,707, southern unit: 2,732)

**APPARENT NATURALNESS ACCORDING TO AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHS AND/OR FIELD SURVEYS:** As drawn by the USFS, Polygon 1458 contains roads, OHV routes, clearcuts, plantations and other developments. As redrawn by conservationists (see map below), the remainder of the area is natural in appearance. The area is now divided into two units, one on the north and one on the south. The remainder of the polygon is also free of any designated vehicle routes according to the MVUM.


**IMPORTANT VALUES AND FEATURES:** Old-growth conifer forests, meadows and riparian habitat that compliment the adjacent designated Wilderness.

**NOTES:** Polygon 1458 includes several roads, other vehicle routes and private land. We have redrawn the polygon to exclude all of these features. Please note that the sights and sounds of nearby roads and motorized trails have no bearing on the natural character or wilderness character of this roadless area. Such sights and sounds are common in the NWPS.

**MAP:** Polygon 1458 is shown in red, below. The portions of Polygon 1458 that we would like to see recommended for Wilderness designation are shaded.

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SFL et al. Comments on the DEIS for draft forest plans on the Inyo, Sequoia, and Sierra national forests (August 25, 2016)
SOUTH SIERRA ADDITIONS PROPOSED RECOMMENDED WILDERNESS (hatched)
SUNDAY PEAK PROPOSED BACKCOUNTRY AREA
USFS WILDERNESS INVENTORY POLYGON NUMBER: 99
INVENTORIED ROADLESS AREA NAME (if applicable): N/A
ACRES: 9,352

APPARENT NATURALNESS ACCORDING TO AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHS AND/OR FIELD SURVEYS: Extensive network of closed roads, clearcuts, tree plantations and other disturbances. Otherwise natural in appearance. Free of any designated vehicle routes according to the MVUM.

CALIFORNIA NATURAL DIVERSITY DATABASE PLANT AND ANIMAL SPECIES: Bald eagle, California spotted owl, Call's angelica, delicate bluecup, fisher, Greenhorn fritillary, Greenhorn Mountains slender salamander, gregarious slender salamander, Kern Canyon clarkia, lodgepole chipmunk, Mojave tarplant, northern goshawk, oak-leaved nemophila, pine fritillary, Piute cypress, rose-flowered larkspur, Shirley Meadows star-tulip, short-bracted bird's-beak, Sierra marten, Sierra Nevada monkeyflower, slender clarkia, southern Sierra woolly sunflower, Tracy's eriastrum and Transverse Range phacelia.

IMPORTANT VALUES AND FEATURES: Old-growth conifer forest, oak woodlands and riparian habitat. It is very important that these low-elevation habitats be protected due to the fact that they are very poorly-represented in both the NWPS and in designated Wilderness in the Sequoia NF.
MAP: Polygon 99 is shown in red, below. The portion of Polygon 99 that we would like to see managed as Backcountry under the name of “Lumreau Creek” is shaded.
November 17, 2014

Dean Gould
Forest Supervisor
Sierra National Forest
1600 Tollhouse Road
Clovis, CA 93611

Subject: Recommendations for the management of the roadless areas in the Sierra National Forest for the Land Management Plan revision process

Dear Mr. Gould:

The following input is meant to supplement the scoping comments that The Wilderness Society and California Wilderness Coalition submitted previously on the Sierra National Forest’s Land Management Plan revision process.

After carefully reviewing the areas included in the US Forest Service’s (USFS) Wilderness Inventory, we request that the Sierra National Forest propose to manage its roadless lands in the Land Management Plan revision in the manner summarized in the following matrix. Our reasons for offering these recommendations are included in the pages below. Please note that all of the areas described below can be managed as either Recommended Wilderness or Backcountry without closing any legally-open roads or motorized trails. Please also note that for the Recommended Wilderness areas, we have taken the USFS’ Wilderness Inventory polygons and removed all significant disturbances such as large clearcuts, large plantations, water diversions, closed roads that still leave significant scars on the landscape, reservoirs, powerlines, areas of major mining damage and other human-caused impacts that are incompatible with Wilderness values when they dominate the landscape.

Our recommendations demonstrate that it is feasible to manage many of the Sierra National Forest’s roadless areas as either Recommended Wilderness or Backcountry without creating substantial conflicts with off-highway vehicle recreation or other important activities. Our recommendations also
demonstrate that it is possible to draft boundaries for Recommended Wilderness areas that do not include excessively disturbed lands. We encourage you to include these recommendations in the preferred alternative in the Sierra National Forest’s forthcoming draft Land Management Plan.

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<tr>
<th>AREA NAME</th>
<th>RECOMMENDED WILDERNESS</th>
<th>BACKCOUNTRY MANAGEMENT</th>
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<td>Cats Head Mountain</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chiquito Creek</td>
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<td>Devils Gulch</td>
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<td>Dinkey Lakes Additions</td>
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<td>Graham Mountain</td>
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</table>

The following narratives describe each of the proposed Recommended Wilderness areas and Backcountry zones.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Ryan Henson  
Senior Policy Director  
California Wilderness Coalition  
3313 Nathan Drive  
Anderson, CA 96007  
530-365-1455  
rhenson@calwild.org

Stan Van Velsor, Ph.D.  
Senior Regional Representative  
The Wilderness Society  
250 Montgomery Street, Suite 210  
San Francisco, CA 94104  
415-398-1484  
stan_vanvelsor@tws.org
Ansel Adams Additions Proposed Recommended Wilderness

**USFS Wilderness Inventory polygon number:** 819, 820 and 822

**Inventoried roadless area name (if applicable):** San Joaquin

**Acres:** 36,153. The area is in five units: Fuller (6,069 acres), Rattlesnake (18,271 acres), Miller (1,739 acres), Granite (3,177 acres) and Green (6,897 acres).

**Apparent naturalness according to aerial photographs and/or field surveys:** As drawn by the USFS, the roadless polygons contained authorized vehicle routes, a large number of logged areas and Mammoth Pool Reservoir. As redrawn by conservationists (see map below), the area is free of all authorized vehicle routes and developments. It therefore meets the naturalness criteria described in the Wilderness Act.

**California Natural Diversity Database plant and animal species:** American pine marten, American peregrine falcon, bald eagle, California condor, California spotted owl, California wolverine, Congdon's sedge, fisher, Fresno County bird's-beak, great gray owl, northern goshawk, osprey, sharp-shinned hawk, short-leaved hulsea, Sierra Madre yellow-legged frog, Sierra Nevada red fox, three-ranked hump moss, willow flycatcher, Yosemite ivesia and Yosemite toad.

**Important values and features:** The Ansel Adams Proposed Wilderness Additions is in five units. All of the units are adjacent to the Ansel Adams Wilderness. Ancient forests and meadows characterize this classic Sierra mid-elevation wild land. Large granite boulders and domes dapple the area, and deep, cold creeks flow through it. The roadless lands serve as a portal for the Ansel Adams Wilderness. Trails pass through the area to access the San Joaquin River, Cattle Mountain, Portuguese Flat, Cora Lakes, Jackass Lakes, Norris Lake, Timber Creek and Lillian Lake.

**Notes:** We request that the USFS examine the area’s Wilderness values and character not in isolation, but in light of the fact that it borders the Ansel Adams Wilderness. Please note that the sights and sounds of nearby roads and motorized trails has no bearing on the natural or Wilderness character of this roadless area. Such sights and sounds are common in the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS).

**Map:** The proposed Recommended Wilderness as drawn by conservationists is shown in blue, below. Please note that the map below is for general representation purposes only. Our actual proposal is drawn on 7.5-minute topographic maps that will be shared with the USFS in GIS format.
Cats Head Mountain Proposed Recommended Wilderness

**USFS Wilderness Inventory polygon number:** 304

**Inventoried roadless area name (if applicable):** N/A

**Acres:** 5,888

**Apparent naturalness according to aerial photographs and/or field surveys:** While the roadless polygon mapped by the USFS contained a portion of Pine Flat Reservoir, as redrawn by conservationists (see below) the area is free of all significant human-caused disturbances. The area is also free of all authorized vehicle routes. It therefore meets the naturalness criteria described in the Wilderness Act.

**California Natural Diversity Database plant and animal species:** Bald eagle, California condor, California spotted owl, Cooper's hawk, Farnsworth's jewel-flower, fisher, Fresno ceanothus, great gray owl, northern goshawk, osprey, prairie falcon, sharp-shinned hawk, streambank spring beauty, thread-leaved beakseed, western mastiff bat and western pond turtle.

**Important values and features:** Cats Head is something that is quite rare in the Sierra Nevada: a low-elevation roadless area on public land. Most federal wild places are at mid to high-elevations because of the homesteading, logging, mining, and other development activities that removed low-elevation lands from the public domain. The roadless area ranges in elevation from 3,460 feet atop Cats Head Mountain to 1,124 feet near Sycamore Creek. The area’s rugged slopes are covered with oak woodlands, grasslands and chaparral, with small groves of cedar and ponderosa pine in shaded pockets. The area includes over 1,800 acres of oak woodland. Given its low-elevation and plentiful forage, the area is important winter deer habitat. Deep Creek dominates the central portion of the area, and despite its seasonal nature, pools of water can be found in the canyon year-round. The roadless area contains the popular Deep Creek Trail and Bobs Flat Trail. Unlike many of the SNF’s trails, these routes remain open when other trails are covered in snow.

**Notes:** Please note that the sights and sounds of nearby roads and motorized trails has no bearing on the natural or Wilderness character of this roadless area. Such sights and sounds are common in the NWPS.

**Map:** The proposed RW as drawn by conservationists is shown in blue, below. Please note that the map below is for general representation purposes only. Our actual proposal is drawn on 7.5-minute topographic maps that will be shared with the USFS in GIS format.
SFL et al. Comments on the DEIS for draft forest plans on the Inyo, Sequoia, and Sierra national forests (August 25, 2016)
Chiquito Creek Proposed Backcountry Area
USFS Wilderness Inventory polygon number: 688
Inventoried roadless area name (if applicable): N/A
Acres: 6,510

Apparent naturalness according to aerial photographs and/or field surveys: The area contains no authorized motorized vehicle routes.

California Natural Diversity Database plant and animal species: Yosemite toad, northern goshawk, golden eagle, bald eagle, American peregrine falcon, great gray owl, California spotted owl, Lahontan cutthroat trout, Sierra Nevada red fox, California wolverine, Pacific marten, fisher, American badger, western pond turtle, Bolander's bruchia, Bolander's clover, Yosemite lewisia, Mono Hot Springs evening-primrose, subalpine fireweed, cut-leaved monkeyflower, Fresno ceanothus and Yosemite ivesia.

Important values and features: This roadless area contains abundant mixed-conifer old-growth forest, meadows, and clear-running streams. It would make an excellent area for the construction of multi-use non-motorized trails.

Notes: The area is suitable for Backcountry, rather than Recommended Wilderness, because of its logging history and narrow configuration.

Map: The proposed Backcountry Area is shown in red, below. Please note that the map below is for general representation purposes only. Our actual proposal is drawn on 7.5-minute topographic maps that will be shared with the USFS in GIS format.
Devil’s Gulch Proposed Recommended Wilderness

USFS Wilderness Inventory polygon number: 772

Inventoried roadless area name (if applicable): Devil’s Gulch

Acres: 47,036

Apparent naturalness according to aerial photographs and/or field surveys: While the roadless polygon mapped by the USFS contains type-conversions, logged areas, managed plantations, roads, structures and some significant mining scars, as redrawn by conservationists (see below) the area is free of the vast majority of such impacts. The area is free of all authorized vehicle routes. It therefore meets the naturalness criteria described in the Wilderness Act.

California Natural Diversity Database plant and animal species: Bacigalupi's yampah, black swift, California spotted owl, Congdon's woolly sunflower, cut-leaved monkeyflower, fisher, fringed myotis, great gray owl, Hall's daisy, hoary bat, Jepson's dodder, long-legged myotis, mountain lady's-slipper, pallid bat, short-bracted bird's-beak, Sierra bolandra, Sierra clarkia, Sierra Madre yellow-legged frog, Sierra pygmy grasshopper, Sierra starwort, silver-haired bat, small bur-reed, spotted bat, thread-leaved beakseed, Tompkins' sedge, Vaux's swift, western mastiff bat, western pond turtle and Yuma myotis.

Important values and features: The roadless area is composed of steep slopes rising up from the banks of the Wild and Scenic South Fork Merced River from 1,398 feet to 6,989 feet. The area borders Yosemite National Park on the east. The roadless area is both a rare and extremely valuable priority for conservation because it is one of the lowest-elevation wild places in the southern Sierra where most protected landscapes are sub-alpine or alpine and most low to mid-elevation areas have been mined, logged, developed or roaded. For example, according to an analysis conducted by The Wilderness Society, the area includes over 6,000 acres of oak woodlands. The Bishop Creek drainage in the roadless area contains a particularly fine stand of old-growth ponderosa pine forest. The South Fork Trail follows the river and is very popular for its spectacular spring wildflower displays. The Merced is also popular among rafters, kayakers and swimmers. The area’s low-elevation habitat would increase the ecological diversity of the lands managed as Wilderness in the SNF. Managing the area as recommended Wilderness would also increase the recreational diversity of the Wilderness experience available on the SNF by including an area that has trails that are accessible when the Sierra highcountry is blanketed by snow.

Notes: We request that the USFS examine the area’s Wilderness values and character not in isolation, but in light of the fact that it borders Yosemite National Park. Please note that the sights and sounds of nearby roads and motorized trails has no bearing on the natural or Wilderness character of this roadless area. Such sights and sounds are common in the NWPS.

Map: The proposed RW as drawn by conservationists is shown in red, below. Please note that the map below is for general representation purposes only. Our actual proposal is drawn on 7.5-minute topographic maps that will be shared with the USFS in GIS format.
Dinkey Lakes Additions Proposed Recommended Wilderness

USFS Wilderness Inventory polygon number: 539

Inventoried roadless area name (if applicable): Dinkey Lakes

Acres: 43,248. In three units: Dinkey Dome unit (10,528 acres), North unit (9,277 acres) and South unit (23,443 acres).

Apparent naturalness according to aerial photographs and/or field surveys: While the roadless polygon mapped by the USFS contains logged areas, plantations, roads, structures, mining scars, Jeep trails, ski lifts, utility lines and Courtright Reservoir, as redrawn by conservationists (see below) the area is free of all of these features save for some minor logging scars on the periphery. As redrawn, the area is also free of all authorized vehicle routes. It therefore meets the naturalness criteria described in the Wilderness Act.

California Natural Diversity Database plant and animal species: American marten, American peregrine falcon, bald eagle, California condor, California spotted owl, California wolverine, Cooper's hawk, fisher, Fresno County bird's-beak, great gray owl, gregarious slender salamander, Lahontan cutthroat trout, marsh claytonia, northern goshawk, osprey, Sierra Madre yellow-legged frog, Sierra Nevada red fox, three-ranked hump moss, Volcano Creek golden trout, western pond turtle, White-headed woodpecker, willow flycatcher and Yosemite toad.

Important values and features: The area contains dozens of lakes and meadows situated in glacier-carved bowls. Between these flow cold, gushing streams surrounded by forests of hardwoods and old-growth conifers. The roadless area serves as a habitat connection between the John Muir and Kaiser Wilderness areas. Dinkey Creek is a V-shaped, deep whitewater stream with waterfalls and is a major tributary of the North Fork Kings River. Dinkey Dome and Marble Point and are both large, impressive edifices that rise above Dinkey Creek and one of its tributaries. Trails in the area access Hatch Lake, Mystery Lake, Rockhouse Meadow, Weldons Camp, Big Creek, Beryl Lake, Tocher Lake and other features. Rancheria Falls is a scenic wonder accessed by a popular trail.

Notes: We request that the USFS examine the area’s Wilderness values and character not in isolation, but in light of the fact that it borders the existing Dinkey Lakes Wilderness. Please note that the sights and sounds of nearby roads and motorized trails has no bearing on the natural or Wilderness character of this roadless area. Such sights and sounds are common in the NWPS.

Map: The proposed RW as drawn by conservationists is shown in blue, below. Please note that the map below is for general representation purposes only. Our actual proposal is drawn on 7.5-minute topographic maps that will be shared with the USFS in GIS format.
SFL et al. Comments on the DEIS for draft forest plans on the Inyo, Sequoia, and Sierra national forests (August 25, 2016)
Graham Mountain Proposed Recommended Wilderness

USFS Wilderness Inventory polygon number: 586

Inventoried roadless area name (if applicable): N/A

Acres: 5,265

Apparent naturalness according to aerial photographs and/or field surveys: While the roadless polygon mapped by the USFS contains plantations and utility lines, as redrawn by conservationists (see below) the area is free of the vast majority of such impacts. The area is free of all authorized vehicle routes. It therefore meets the naturalness criteria described in the Wilderness Act.

California Natural Diversity Database plant and animal species: Bald eagle, California spotted owl, fisher, northern goshawk, osprey, sharp-shinned hawk, short-bracted bird's-beak, Sierra Nevada red fox, western pond turtle and Yosemite evening-primrose.

Important values and features: The roadless area consists of the south-face of Graham Mountain and it is drained by Salter, Chilkoot and Pines creeks. The area is characterized by wet meadows, chaparral, exposed granite outcrops, old-growth forests, oak thickets and chaparral. While it has no official trails at this time, it could provide non-motorized recreation opportunities in the future for the communities and campgrounds around Bass Lake.

Notes: Please note that the sights and sounds of nearby roads, reservoirs and motorized trails has no bearing on the natural or Wilderness character of this roadless area. Such sights and sounds are common in the NWPS.

Map: The proposed RW as drawn by conservationists is shown in blue, below. Please note that the map below is for general representation purposes only. Our actual proposal is drawn on 7.5-minute topographic maps that will be shared with the USFS in GIS format.
John Muir Additions Proposed Recommended Wilderness

USFS Wilderness Inventory polygon number: 781, 795, 797 and 1378

Inventoried roadless area name (if applicable): Rancheria

Acres: 6,547. In four units: Rancheria unit (3,783 acres), Helms unit (267 acres), Ward unit (1,199) and Bolsillo unit (1,298 acres).

Apparent naturalness according to aerial photographs and/or field surveys: While the roadless polygon mapped by the USFS contains logged areas, plantations, roads and structures, as redrawn by conservationists (see below) the area is free of all of these features. As redrawn, the area is also free of all authorized vehicle routes. It therefore meets the naturalness criteria described in the Wilderness Act.

California Natural Diversity Database plant and animal species: American pine marten, American peregrine falcon, aquatic felt lichen, bald eagle, California condor, California spotted owl, California wolverine, cascades frog, Cooper's hawk, fisher, Fresno ceanothus, Fresno County bird's-beak, golden eagle, great gray owl, Howell's tanschia, Kings River slender salamander, Lahontan cutthroat trout, northern goshawk, osprey, prairie falcon, sharp-shinned hawk, Sierra Madre yellow-legged frog, Sierra Nevada red fox, streambank spring beauty, thread-leaved beakseed, three-ranked hump moss, Tulare County bleeding heart, western pond turtle, willow flycatcher and Yosemite toad.

Important values and features: These small roadless areas are adjacent to the John Muir Wilderness and are thus part of a vast network of wild lands that extends unbroken for hundreds of square miles. All four roadless areas are covered with meadows, streams and very rich old-growth forests that provide clean water and important habitat links to the Wilderness and lands beyond. Trails to the Rancheria Creek drainage, Corbett Lake and Statham Meadow pass through the roadless areas.

Notes: We request that the USFS examine the area’s Wilderness values and character not in isolation, but in light of the fact that it borders the existing John Muir Wilderness. Please note that the sights and sounds of nearby roads and motorized trails has no bearing on the natural or Wilderness character of this roadless area. Such sights and sounds are common in the NWPS.

Map: The proposed Recommended Wilderness as drawn by conservationists is shown red, below. Please note that the maps below are for general representation purposes only. Our actual proposal is drawn on 7.5-minute topographic maps that will be shared with the USFS in GIS format.
Kaiser Additions Proposed Recommended Wilderness

USFS Wilderness Inventory polygon number: 577

Inventoried roadless area name (if applicable): N/A

Acres: 7,788

Apparent naturalness according to aerial photographs and/or field surveys: The area is free of all authorized vehicle routes. Despite some minor logging scars along its periphery, it meets the naturalness criteria described in the Wilderness Act.

California Natural Diversity Database plant and animal species: American marten, American peregrine falcon, bald eagle, California condor, California spotted owl, California wolverine, common loon, cut-leaved monkeyflower, fisher, foothill yellow-legged frog, Fresno ceanothus, Fresno County bird's-beak, golden eagle, great gray owl, Mono Hot Springs evening-primrose, northern goshawk, northern goshawk, osprey, Rawson's flaming trumpet, sharp-shinned hawk, short-leaved hulsea, Sierra Nevada red fox, small-flowered monkeyflower, three-ranked hump moss, western pond turtle, willow flycatcher, Yosemite evening-primrose and Yosemite toad.

Important values and features: The roadless area is characterized by rich meadows, rushing streams and beautiful, classic Sierra old-growth mixed conifer forest. It is crossed by several trails that access the existing Kaiser Wilderness.

Notes: We request that the USFS examine the area’s Wilderness values and character not in isolation, but in light of the fact that it borders the Kaiser Wilderness. Please note that the sights and sounds of nearby roads and motorized trails has no bearing on the natural or Wilderness character of this roadless area. Such sights and sounds are common in the NWPS.

Map: The proposed RW as drawn by conservationists is shown in red, below. Please note that the map below is for general representation purposes only. Our actual proposal is drawn on 7.5-minute topographic maps that will be shared with the USFS in GIS format.
SFL et al. Comments on the DEIS for draft forest plans on the Inyo, Sequoia, and Sierra national forests (August 25, 2016)
Monarch Additions Proposed Recommended Wilderness
USFS Wilderness Inventory polygon number: 1378
Inventoried roadless area name (if applicable): Kings River
Acres: 27,981
Apparent naturalness according to aerial photographs and/or field surveys: The area is free of all authorized vehicle routes. It therefore meets the naturalness criteria described in the Wilderness Act.

California Natural Diversity Database plant and animal species: American manna grass, American peregrine falcon, bald eagle, Bolander's clover, broad-nerved hump moss, California condor, California spotted owl, Congdon's lewisia, Cooper's hawk, Farnsworth's jewelflower, few-flowered eriastrum, field ivesia, fisher, flammulated owl, foothill yellow-legged frog, Fresno County bird's-beak, golden eagle, great gray owl, Hall's daisy, Howell's tauschia, Keil's daisy, King's Creek parapsyche caddisfly, Kings River buckwheat, Kings River slender salamander, Lahontan cutthroat trout, limestone dudleya, Madera leptosiphon, Muir's tarplant, northern goshawk, osprey, Pacific marten, prairie falcon, Robbins' pondweed, sharp-shinned hawk, Shevock's copper moss, Sierra Nevada monkeyflower, Sierra Nevada red fox, Sierra Nevada yellow-legged frog, southern Sierra woolly sunflower, streambank spring beauty, subalpine fireweed, three-ranked hump moss, Tompkins' sedge, Townsend's big-eared bat, Tracy's eriastrum, Tulare County bleeding heart, valley elderberry longhorn beetle, western pond turtle, western waterfan lichen, willow flycatcher, Yosemite bog orchid, Yosemite ivesia and Yosemite toad.

Important values and features: The Kings River Canyon is truly spectacular. In fact, it is so spectacular that it is surprising that it is not part of the National Park System. The Wild and Scenic Kings River offers a truly outstanding Class 3 whitewater run. The river is fed by numerous streams running through deeply-incised gorges, often with impressive waterfalls. The canyon includes riparian forest, grasslands, oak woodlands, old-growth forests and other critically-important low-elevation habitats. By managing the area as Wilderness, the USFS would preserve an unbroken landscape ranging from 1,100 feet along the Kings River to the top of 14,505-foot Mount Whitney. This is possibly the most dramatic elevation profile of any roadless area in California. In a time of climate change, it is critically important that such habitat diversity be maintained in an unbroken state.

Notes: We request that the USFS examine the area’s Wilderness values and character not in isolation, but in light of the fact that it borders the Monarch Wilderness. Please note that the sights and sounds of nearby roads and motorized trails has no bearing on the natural or Wilderness character of this roadless area. Such sights and sounds are common in the NWPS.

Map: The proposed RW as drawn by conservationists is shown in blue, below. Please note that the map below is for general representation purposes only. Our actual proposal is drawn on 7.5-minute topographic maps that will be shared with the USFS in GIS format.
SFL et al. Comments on the DEIS for draft forest plans on the Inyo, Sequoia, and Sierra national forests (August 25, 2016)
Mount Raymond Proposed Recommended Wilderness

**USFS Wilderness Inventory polygon number:** 821

**Inventoried roadless area name (if applicable):** Mount Raymond

**Acres:** 12,237

**Apparent naturalness according to aerial photographs and/or field surveys:** As drawn by the USFS, the polygon contains three authorized vehicle routes. As redrawn by conservationists (see map below), the area is free of all authorized vehicle routes. Despite some minor logging scars along its periphery, it meets the naturalness criteria described in the Wilderness Act.

**California Natural Diversity Database plant and animal species:** Alkali ivesia, American pine marten, bald eagle, California spotted owl, fisher, fringed myotis, great gray owl, hoary bat, long-eared myotis, long-legged myotis, mud sedge, northern goshawk, pallid bat, Sierra Madre yellow-legged frog, silver-haired bat, spotted bat, three-ranked hump moss, western mastiff bat, western red bat, Yosemite toad and Yuma myotis.

**Important values and features:** This roadless area borders the Wild and Scenic South Fork Merced River and Yosemite National Park on the north. It contains several large lakes and meadows and rich old-growth forests of pine and fir. Six trails cross through the area and access Chiquito Lake, South Fork Merced River, Iron Creek, Dutchman Lake and other destinations both in the roadless area and Yosemite National Park.

**Notes:** We request that the USFS examine the area’s Wilderness values and character not in isolation, but in light of the fact that it borders designated wilderness in Yosemite National Park. Please note that the sights and sounds of nearby roads and motorized trails has no bearing on the natural or Wilderness character of this roadless area. Such sights and sounds are common in the NWPS.

**Map:** The proposed Recommended Wilderness as drawn by conservationists is shown in blue, below. Please note that the map below is for general representation purposes only. Our actual proposal is drawn on 7.5-minute topographic maps that will be shared with the USFS in GIS format.
North Fork Kings River Proposed Backcountry Area

USFS Wilderness Inventory polygon number: 330

Inventoried roadless area name (if applicable): N/A

Acres: 7,313

Apparent naturalness according to aerial photographs and/or field surveys: As drawn by the USFS, Polygon 330 has several small plantations along its periphery, closed roads, a portion of Black Rock Reservoir, mine tailings and a spillway at Wishon Reservoir. However, as redrawn by conservationists, all of these disturbances have been excluded (see map below). The area contains no authorized motorized vehicle routes.

California Natural Diversity Database plant and animal species: American manna grass, American peregrine falcon, bald eagle, Bolander's clover, broad-nerved hump moss, California condor, California spotted owl, California wolverine, Cooper's hawk, fisher, foothill yellow-legged frog, Fresno County bird's-beak, golden eagle, great gray owl, Howell's tauschia, Kings River slender salamander, Lahontan cutthroat trout, Madera leptosiphon, Muir's tarplant, northern goshawk, osprey, Pacific marten, prairie falcon, sharp-shinned hawk, Sierra Nevada red fox, Sierra Nevada yellow-legged frog, streambank spring beauty, subalpine fireweed, three-ranked hump moss, Townsend's big-eared bat, Tulare County bleeding heart, valley elderberry longhorn beetle, western pond turtle, western waterfan lichen, willow flycatcher, Yosemite bog orchid, Yosemite ivesia and Yosemite toad.

Important values and features: This wild area includes abundant mixed-conifer old-growth forest, ponds, meadows, waterfalls and over seven miles of the North Fork Kings River. The North Fork Kings flows through Granite Gorge, a scenic stretch of wild stream that serves to remind visitors what the region looked like before so many of its important river canyons were inundated under reservoirs. Limestone formations in the Kings Cavern Geological Area include over ten caves ranging in size from small grottos to deep recesses with stalactites, stalagmites and other interesting features.

Notes: The area is suitable for Backcountry, rather than Recommended Wilderness, because of its long and narrow configuration.

Map: The proposed RW as drawn by conservationists is shown in yellow, below. Please note that the map below is for general representation purposes only. Our actual proposal is drawn on 7.5-minute topographic maps that will be shared with the USFS in GIS format.
SFL et al. Comments on the DEIS for draft forest plans on the Inyo, Sequoia, and Sierra national forests (August 25, 2016)
Peckinpah Creek Proposed Backcountry Area
USFS Wilderness Inventory polygon number: 557
Inventoried roadless area name (if applicable): N/A
Acres: 5,037

Apparent naturalness according to aerial photographs and/or field surveys: While the roadless polygon mapped by the USFS contained a large clearcut, as redrawn by conservationists (see below) the area is free of all significant human-caused disturbances. The area does not contain any designated vehicle routes.

California Natural Diversity Database plant and animal species: Abrams' onion, Bolander's bruchia, brook pocket moss, California spotted owl, Cascades frog, Coleman's rein orchid, Cooper's hawk, fisher, foothill yellow-legged frog, great gray owl, grey-leaved violet, Kettle Dome buckwheat, northern goshawk, Rawson's flaming trumpet, short-leaved hulsea, Shuteye Peak fawn lily, southern Sierra woolly sunflower, subalpine fireweed, three-ranked hump moss, western pond turtle and western waterfan lichen.

Important values and features: The area contains scenic granite outcrops, small meadows, patches of mixed-conifer forest and oak stands. Sand Creek is a small, gushing stream in a ravine that contains several pleasant holes for swimming and wading.

Notes: The area is suitable for Backcountry, rather than Recommended Wilderness, because of its long and narrow configuration.

Map: The proposed Backcountry Area as drawn by conservationists is shown in red, below. Please note that the map below is for general representation purposes only. Our actual proposal is drawn on 7.5-minute topographic maps that will be shared with the USFS in GIS format.
San Joaquin River Proposed Backcountry Area
USFS Wilderness Inventory polygon number: 819
Inventoried roadless area name (if applicable): N/A
Acres: 13,155

Apparent naturalness according to aerial photographs and/or field surveys: As drawn by the USFS, Polygon 819 has several small plantations, mines, logged areas, Mammoth Pool Reservoir, roads, utility lines and fuelbreaks. As redrawn by conservationists, the area contains a few minor logging scars. The area contains no authorized motorized vehicle routes.

California Natural Diversity Database plant and animal species: American pine marten, American peregrine falcon, bald eagle, California condor, California spotted owl, California wolverine, common loon, cut-leaved monkeyflower, fisher, foothill yellow-legged frog, Fresno ceanothus, Fresno County bird's-beak, golden eagle, great gray owl, Mono Hot Springs evening-primrose, northern goshawk, osprey, Rawson's flaming trumpet, sharp-shinned hawk, short-leaved hulsea, Sierra Nevada red fox, small-flowered monkeyflower, three-ranked hump moss, western pond turtle, willow flycatcher, Yosemite evening-primrose and Yosemite toad.

Important values and features: The San Joaquin River flows for seven miles through a deep gorge in the heart of this roadless area between Mammoth Pool and Dam Six. The area is characterized by plunging slopes, exposed granite formations, roaring side-streams, oak forest, patches of old-growth conifer forest and chaparral. The French Trail passes through much of the area from north to south on the steep western side of the San Joaquin River. The path is known for its wonderful spring wildflower displays. The area’s conservation value is greatly enhanced by its relatively low-elevation.

Notes: The area is suitable for Backcountry, rather than Recommended Wilderness, because of its narrow configuration.

Map: The proposed Backcountry Area is shown in yellow, below. Please note that the map below is for general representation purposes only. Our actual proposal is drawn on 7.5-minute topographic maps that will be shared with the USFS in GIS format.
SFL et al. Comments on the DEIS for draft forest plans on the Inyo, Sequoia, and Sierra national forests (August 25, 2016)
**Shuteye Proposed Recommended Wilderness**

**USFS Wilderness Inventory polygon number:** 646

**Inventoried roadless area name (if applicable):** Shuteye

**Acres:** 17,990

**Apparent naturalness according to aerial photographs and/or field surveys:** The area is free of all authorized vehicle routes and significant human-caused disturbances. It therefore meets the naturalness criteria described in the Wilderness Act.

**California Natural Diversity Database plant and animal species:** American pine marten, bald eagle, California spotted owl, cascades frog, fisher, Fresno ceanothus, golden eagle, great gray owl, northern goshawk, osprey, Rawson's flaming trumpet, sharp-shinned hawk, short-leaved hulsea, Sierra Madre yellow-legged frog, Sierra Nevada red fox, three-ranked hump moss, western pond turtle and Yosemite toad.

**Important values and features:** This extremely scenic and ecologically-diverse area is characterized by jumbled domes and shell-like rock formations with meadows, chaparral, old-growth forests and streams situated between them. The area also contains several ponds. Two trails cross the area from east to west.

**Notes:** Please note that the sights and sounds of nearby roads and motorized trails has no bearing on the natural or Wilderness character of this roadless area. Such sights and sounds are common in the NWPS.

**Map:** The proposed RW is shown below in black, below. Please note that the map below is for general representation purposes only. Our actual proposal is drawn on 7.5-minute topographic maps that will be shared with the USFS in GIS format.
Soaproot Recommended Wilderness

**USFS Wilderness Inventory polygon number:** 357

**Inventoried roadless area name (if applicable):** N/A

**Acres:** 5,325

**Apparent naturalness according to aerial photographs and/or field surveys:** As drawn by the USFS, Polygon 357 has two small plantations along its southeastern side and a utility corridor in its northern portion. However, as redrawn by conservationists, the utility has been excluded (see map below). The area contains no authorized motorized vehicle routes. As redrawn, the area meets the naturalness criteria described in the Wilderness Act.

**California Natural Diversity Database plant and animal species:** Gregarious slender salamander, foothill yellow-legged frog, Sierra Nevada yellow-legged frog, Coast Range newt, northern goshawk, sharp-shinned hawk, bald eagle, osprey, American peregrine falcon, great gray owl, California spotted owl, willow flycatcher, Sierra Nevada red fox, Sierra marten, fisher, long-legged myotis, Yuma myotis, western pond turtle, southern Sierra woolly sunflower, orange lupine, tree-anemone, marsh claytonia, Yosemite lewisia, Fresno County bird's-beak, slender-stalked monkeyflower, small-flowered monkeyflower, cut-leaved monkeyflower, Madera leptosiphon, Ewan's larkspur, Fresno ceanothus and Yosemite ivesia.

**Important values and features:** The Soaproot region is a rare resource: a low-elevation Sierra roadless area. It is characterized by chaparral, dry meadows, blue oak woodlands and patches of conifers along drainages. By managing the area as a recommended wilderness, the USFS could increase the ecological diversity of lands managed as Wilderness in the SNF.

**Notes:** Please note that the sights and sounds of nearby roads and motorized trails has no bearing on the natural or Wilderness character of this roadless area. Such sights and sounds are common in the NWPS.

**Map:** The proposed RW as drawn by conservationists is shown in red, below. Please note that the map below is for general representation purposes only. Our actual proposal is drawn on 7.5-minute topographic maps that will be shared with the USFS in GIS format.
Sycamore Springs Proposed Wilderness

USFS Wilderness Inventory polygon number: 315

Inventoried roadless area name (if applicable): Sycamore Springs

Acres: 17,653

Apparent naturalness according to aerial photographs and/or field surveys: Polygon 315 contains an unauthorized vehicle route in Section 36 southeast of Indian Rock. There may also be very small plantations along the route. These disturbances do not overly detract from the polygon’s overall naturalness, especially given that the remainder of the area is quite wild in appearance. As drawn by the USFS, the polygon includes authorized route 11S41, but the proposal drawn by conservationists (see map below) excludes the route and all other authorized vehicle routes. The proposal meets the naturalness criteria described in the Wilderness Act.

California Natural Diversity Database plant and animal species: American pine marten, American peregrine falcon, aquatic felt lichen, bald eagle, California condor, California spotted owl, cascades frog, Cooper's hawk, fisher, Fresno ceanothus, Fresno County bird's-beak, golden eagle, great gray owl, Howell's tauschia, Kings River slender salamander, Lahontan cutthroat trout, northern goshawk, prairie falcon, sharp-shinned hawk, Sierra Nevada red fox, streambank spring beauty, thread-leaved beakseed, three-ranked hump moss, western pond turtle, willow flycatcher and Yosemite toad.

Important values and features: Dinkey Creek flows for over six miles through this roadless area just before the stream joins the North Fork Kings River. Numerous waterfalls exist on Dinkey and its tributaries in the area, followed by eroded, deep plunge-pools. The wild place includes some of the finest ancient forest on the western slope of the southern Sierra Nevada, including many particularly large sugar pines. Much of the ancient forest in the area is composed of fire-adapted stands with open understories and a park-like structure. Black Rock, Patterson Bluffs and Indian Rock are highly scenic granite features that rise from its chaparral, oak groves and ancient forests. Existing wilderness areas in the Sierra Nevada tend to be located at high-elevations where world-class old-growth mixed-conifer forest does not exist. By managing the area as a recommended wilderness, the USFS could increase the ecological diversity of lands managed as wilderness in the SNF.

Notes: Please note that the sights and sounds of nearby roads and motorized trails has no bearing on the natural or Wilderness character of this roadless area. Such sights and sounds are common in the NWPS.

Map: The proposed RW as drawn by conservationists is shown in black, below. Please note that the map below is for general representation purposes only. Our actual proposal is drawn on 7.5-minute topographic maps that will be shared with the USFS in GIS format.
SFL et al. Comments on the DEIS for draft forest plans on the Inyo, Sequoia, and Sierra national forests (August 25, 2016)
Exhibit IX.9. Wilderness Areas Recommended by the Sierra Club for the Inyo National Forest

The Sierra Club recommends that the Forest Service recommend wilderness designation for all four areas noted in Alternative B and for nine additional areas for the Inyo National Forest. These 13 areas are:

- Piper Mountain Additions (1&2)
- South Sierra Addition East 1
- White Mountains Additions (East & West)
- Ansel Adams Addition Northeast (Horse Meadows)
- Inyo Mountains Addition
- Excelsior
- Deadman Canyon
- Deep Springs North
- Dexter Canyon
- Glass Mountains
- Soldier Canyon