

Senate passes bipartisan Wilderness legislation

Eastern Sierra and Mammoth Water District legislation included in the Omnibus Lands Bill

By Catherine Billey
Mammoth Times Staff Writer

As expected, the Senate passed by a wide margin (73 to 21) on Thursday, Jan. 15 a large public lands package containing three California wilderness bills, including the Eastern Sierra and Northern San Gabriel Wild Heritage Act.

"I am pleased the Senate has recognized the need to set aside 470,000 acres of pristine wilderness in the 25th Congressional District," said Rep. Howard P. "Buck" McKeon (R-Santa Clarita) in a statement on the passage of the bill known as S.22.

Of the 160 bills in the bipartisan package, one quarter of the land is here in the Eastern Sierra, said Bob Haueter, McKeon's Deputy Chief of Staff.

"Furthermore, my water district measure that was included in today's Senate-passed lands bill will allow Mammoth Community Water District, Mono County, and the City of Mammoth to accommodate for their growing economic need by granting them the right to allocate their land resources as needed. Both of these measures are high priorities for the 25th District of California, and I look forward to now shepherding the bill through House passage."

Longtime supporter of the wilderness effort and local resident Tim Alpers, a third generation rancher and fish farmer from Lee Vining, said, "I am pleased with the Senate passage of this bill because it



PHOTO BY ANDY SELTERS

The bill will preserve more than 450,000 acres of wilderness and four wild scenic rivers totaling 73 miles near Santa Clarita and in the Eastern Sierra, including the White Mountains with their rare and well-known stands of bristlecone pines.

preserves beautiful wild lands for future generations, protects watersheds crucial to the health of our fisheries, and provides high quality recreation opportunities for our visitors, which helps our local economy."

"After years of work and extensive collaboration, we are witnessing a momentous occasion that will benefit all Americans for many generations to come," said Mono County Supervisor Byng Hunt. "I am personally very pleased to have witnessed and participated in the development of our local portions of his historic legislation, along with so many others."

"The Wilderness Land Trust's ongoing effort to complete the wilderness legacy envisioned in the 1964 Wilderness Act has taken a major step forward with the acquisition of 2,635 acres in the Southern Sierra Nevada," said Reid Haughey,

President of the Wilderness Land Trust based in Ridgecrest, Calif.

An additional 2,435-acre parcel, also situated in Tulare County, will be conveyed to the Bureau of Land Management to be administered as wilderness.

"The Senate made history with California land conservation today," said Sally Miller, senior field representative for the Wilderness Society in Lee Vining. "Our elected officials crossed party lines, worked with local interests, and came together to protect our state's magnificent natural heritage for present and future generations."

The bill will now move to the House of Representatives. "We're hopeful for consideration in the House soon, but we really have no idea when that might happen," Miller said.

Each piece of the California legislation

involved strong bipartisan effort and support, including Senator Barbara Boxer (D-CA) and Congressman Howard "Buck" McKeon (R-Santa Clarita). Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) cosponsored all three bills.

The Eastern Sierra and Northern San Gabriel Wild Heritage Act will preserve more than 450,000 acres of wilderness and four wild and scenic rivers totaling 73 miles near Santa Clarita and in the Eastern Sierra and White Mountains.

The Senate had passed cloture with a supermajority in a special session on Jan. 11, ensuring that a filibuster would not hinder the legislation.

A vocal opponent to S.22, Dick Noles, co-founder of Advocates for Access to Public Lands (AAPL) was completely disheartened by its passage in the Senate.

"This is a disgrace to the American people, because all of us have a vested interest in true wilderness and this true wilderness has been abandoned," he said in a telephone interview on Jan. 16.

"I can honestly tell you that I cannot be happy about federal legislation that has totally ignored the intent of the 1964 Wilderness Act. That act has been abandoned and is no longer at the table when we negotiate wilderness. The wilderness people have said it. Their intent is not wilderness as it is. It is stopping the extraction of natural resources. They're trying to stop mining."

But this is politics, he added.

To view maps of the Eastern Sierra legislation, visit http://mckeon.house.gov/eastern_sierra_maps.aspx

Mammoth Times

News@MammothTimes.com
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Vol 22, No. 4

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Mammoth Times (USPS 019707)

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Graphic DesignersAndy Rostar, Tiffany Henschel, Liz DesRochers x108

Mammoth Sierra Magazine & Mammoth Printing & Design

Advertising..... Patti Cole x109

• MAMMOTH TIMES is published weekly. Offices at Sierra Center Mall, second floor, 452 Old Mammoth Road, Mammoth Lakes, CA 93546. Telephone: 760-934-3929, fax 760-934-3951. Mammoth Lakes, California. Periodicals Postage Paid at Mammoth Lakes, CA and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Please send address changes to Mammoth Times, P.O. Box 3929, Mammoth Lakes, CA 93546.

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Deadline: Editorial/News submissions: 3 p.m. the Friday before the paper is distributed.

Deadline: Classifieds: Mon. 7 a.m..

Mailing address: P.O. Box 3929, Mammoth Lakes, CA, 93546. The views expressed in opinion columns are those of the authors only and do not necessarily reflect policies and opinions of Mammoth Times, its staff or its owners.

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MAMMOTH TIMES PHOTO/ERICK SUGIMURA

Feet-friendly crampons and ice axe required beyond this point.

On the cover:

Ski History Congress – Submitted Photo/Advocates Survey – Mammoth Times File Photo. Design by Diane Eagle.

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Correction

The Jan. 15 story on alternative livestock incorrectly stated that there are only a handful of slaughterhouses in the U.S. The article should have stated that there are a handful of companies that control the majority of the beef-packing industry (Tyson, Cargill, Swift & Company, National Beef Packing Co., and Smithfield Foods) according to a study put out by the Department of Rural Sociology at the University of Missouri in April 2007.