

## **SUPPORT ADDITIONS TO SEQUOIA-KINGS CANYON WILDERNESS; OPPOSE SPECIAL PROVISIONS**

### Background:

Legislation has been introduced in both the House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate to designate 115,000 acres of Sequoia National Park in California as Wilderness. A portion of that wilderness would be designated as the John Krebs Wilderness and surrounds the Mineral King part of the Park. Krebs was able to get legislation passed in 1978 that transferred the Mineral King area from the United States Forest Service to the National Park Service in order to block a huge destination ski resort proposed by the Walt Disney Corporation.

The John Krebs portion of the proposed wilderness, nearly 70,000 acres, is largely a high elevation area, 8,000 to over 13,000 feet, of scenic glaciated terrain with many glacial lakes. It includes the Hockett Plateau (a mid-level elevation area with scattered green meadows and the source of numerous trout streams), separated by forested ridges at the headwaters of the Kaweah River.

The remainder of the proposed Wilderness is located along the front of the Sierra Nevada mountains and is heavily forested with pine and fir down to oak grasslands at the lowest elevations. These ecosystems are poorly represented in existing Wilderness in the Sierra Nevada. Most of the Marble Fork watershed of the Kaweah River is included, as well as the Redwood Mountain Giant Sequoia Grove.

Together the two areas would protect numerous natural caves, historic trails, and many wildlife species, including the California spotted owl, golden eagles, the nearly extirpated Pacific fisher, giant sequoia groves, and a truly spectacular terrain. When added to the existing designated Wilderness in Sequoia National Park, all of the potential wilderness in the Park will be protected by the Wilderness Act of 1964. California Senator Barbara Boxer has stated: "This legislation will ensure these beautiful areas will be sustained and preserved as part of California's identity and rich natural heritage."

However, part of the legislation would leave four glacial lakes in the Mineral King basin out of the designated Wilderness. These lakes have small dams, on the order of several feet high, at their

outlets to raise the water level a few feet. The stored water is released late in the season to provide hydroelectric energy to a small power plant on the lower reaches of the Kaweah River. The dams were constructed and have been maintained with the use of pack stock. The lakes were left out of the wilderness proposal so that they could be inspected and maintained with the use of helicopters. There is also language in the proposed legislation that provides for the use of helicopters for that purpose. Local environmental groups are opposed to these provisions in the legislation. There is no reason why inspection and maintenance of the dams cannot be done with the use of stock under the provisions of the Wilderness Act.

Further, the legislation allows permanent occupancy and use of two Park Service cabins in the Wilderness, even if the cabins are not necessary for administering the area, which is the test required by the Wilderness Act. The bill would allow the installation and maintenance of "hydrologic, meteorologic, or climatological devices..." or facilities and communication equipment, and contains a special interest "right to ride" provision that would handcuff the ability of wilderness managers to control the use of and impacts caused by the use of pack and riding stock. These exceptions are contrary to the Wilderness Act, would prove harmful to the lands designated by the bill, and would result in further chipping away of the values that the Wilderness Act and the National Wilderness Preservation System seek to protect.

Resolution: The Federation of Western Outdoor Clubs supports adding nearly 115,000 acres of Sequoia National Park in California to the National Wilderness Preservation System, but opposes special provisions in the bill that would omit four lakes in the vicinity of Mineral King from the designated Wilderness, allow the installation and maintenance of several facilities, allow for permanent use of two cabins, and the special access provisions for pack and riding stock in the Wilderness.