

Resolution to Support the Range of Light National Monument in the Sierra Nevada

The Council of Club Leaders requests that the Board of Directors support the Range of Light National Monument, a proposal to protect the federal land between Yosemite and Kings Canyon National Parks.

Passed by the Tehipite Chapter ExCom on July 29, 2019 with 6 voting “Yes,” 0 voting “No” and 3 not voting.

Explanation/Description of issue

Summary Statement: The Range of Light National Monument will protect the federal land between Yosemite and Kings Canyon National Parks. That land is managed by the Sierra National Forest (1.4 million acres), and a small portion is managed by the BLM as the San Joaquin Gorge (about 7000 acres).

Environmental Importance: The Range of Light National Monument lies in the center of the longest interconnected wilderness in the lower 48 and between two National Parks; for more than 150 miles, no road crosses over the range. As the centerpiece, the monument will create an interconnected habitat in the world-renown Sierra Nevada. Half of California’s native plant species live there, and more than 400 are found nowhere else on earth, including the Giant Sequoia. The area is home to 93 at-risk species, 12 of which are on the endangered species list, such as the Sierra Nevada Red Fox and the Great Gray Owl.

Threats: The threats to the area are numerous and interrelated. About 660,000 acres of the forest are grazed, sprayed with herbicides and commercially logged. In addition, past clear-cutting and replanting of single tree species has weakened the forest’s integrity. This weakened forest is threatened by global warming, salvage and commercial logging, current mismanagement, and more than 2500 miles of logging roads. These roads disrupt habitat, threaten wildlife, cause soil erosion and create a management crisis. Recreation sites are polluted, and wildfires are easily started. Most wildfires on public land are human-caused (84 percent), and without protection and education, communities will remain vulnerable.

Solutions: As proposed, the national monument will restore wildlife habitat, create a non-motorized trail system and improve public recreation sites like campgrounds and picnic areas. It will halt commercial logging, retire grazing leases, close selected roads, and introduce a controlled burn program. These changes will save wildlife and reinvigorate the local economy, bolstering jobs in restoration and recreation.

Legacy & the Sierra Club: In 1890, John Muir, the Sierra Club’s founder, worked to create Yosemite and Sequoia National Parks; these parks established our nation’s conservation and preservation ethic and are central to the formation of the Sierra Club. A portion of Muir’s original Yosemite was taken out for mining and logging interests, soon after its designation. The Range of Light National Monument will restore Muir’s original vision and expand upon it, renewing an American legacy—fundamental to the environment, the American people and the Sierra Club.

PROS:

The proposal provides significant benefits by supporting the following:

- **Biodiversity & Connectivity:** California is the most biologically diverse state in the nation, and the Sierra Nevada supports half of California’s native plant species, including the Giant Sequoia. Connectivity is essential to natural communities.

- **Forest Preservation:** The Sierra Nevada is home to one of the most diverse coniferous forests in the world, with 26 different species of conifers. These conifers, particularly old growth trees, protect against global warming.
- **Soil Conservation:** Interactions among the climate, topography, and biota in the Sierra Nevada have created some of the most productive soils for plant species in the world. These soils store substantial amounts of carbon.
- **Watersheds:** Sierra Nevada rivers, lakes, and meadows filter drinking water for millions of Californians, support a robust agricultural community and sustain wildlife.
- **Wildfire:** A natural fire regime is essential to the Sierra Nevada's ecology. It is also vital to the long-term resilience of wild species and people's safety. Forests with the highest levels of protection have wildfires operating within historic bounds.
- **Tribal Traditions:** For centuries, Native Americans of the Sierra Nevada hunted, fished, gathered, and lived in the region. Preserving sacred sites is vital to maintaining cultural identity and tribal traditions.
- **Human Health & the Rural Economy:** Time in nature makes people happier, healthier and smarter. Further, protected public lands promote robust recreation and restoration economies.
- **National Parks and Preserved Public Land:** Our National Parks have become increasingly crowded. The monument will alleviate these impacts by expanding protected areas.

CONS:

- The area is in a politically challenging district, and a successful proposal must be backed by solid support from local, state and national groups and individuals.
- The area will require extensive restoration due current management practices.
- The existing exploitive industries (logging, mining, grazing, fracking) will not benefit from a protected landscape, which is set aside for people and wildlife.
- The area has existing dams and transmission wires, which must be managed in accordance with current contracts. There are also private inholding and cabin leases, which must be managed in accordance with current contracts.

This may present challenges to the management agency. However, Yosemite National Park has a dam, private inholding at Wawona and Yosemite West, transmission wires and leased cabins in El Portal, so these things can be overcome with the appropriate legislation.