

# Executive Summary

Ask a Californian what's the number one threat to wilderness and open space in our state, and you're increasingly likely to hear a single answer: the federal government.

Seemingly liberated after the 2002 elections, the Bush Administration in 2003 uncorked a staggering series of environmental rollbacks that clearly had been some time in the making. From the Department of the Interior, the EPA, and the USDA Forest Service emitted literally hundreds of policy rollbacks, decision reversals, and new pro-industry policies, easing pollution controls and encouraging development and resource extraction on the nation's public lands. Many targeted California lands specifically. As the year wore on, disbelief turned to outrage as the public saw the administration was methodically attacking 30 years of environmental progress with new federal measures weakening the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, the Endangered Species Act, the Roadless Area Conservation Rule, and the Wilderness Act.

As we look out over the California landscape today, we see the federal government opening our national monuments to logging, our national forests to logging and oil drilling, and our last wilderness to road-building and uncontrolled off-road vehicle abuse. Many of California's wild areas that Congress is now considering for permanent protection are simultaneously being targeted by the Bush Administration for logging or energy development.

Adding to this strain are two of the state's largest corporate landowners, whose plans for their vast private landholdings — industrial logging and urban sprawl — threaten to eliminate some of California's most biologically important habitat for endangered wildlife. Once again, choosing 10 places in the greatest danger was difficult, starting from a list more than twice that long.

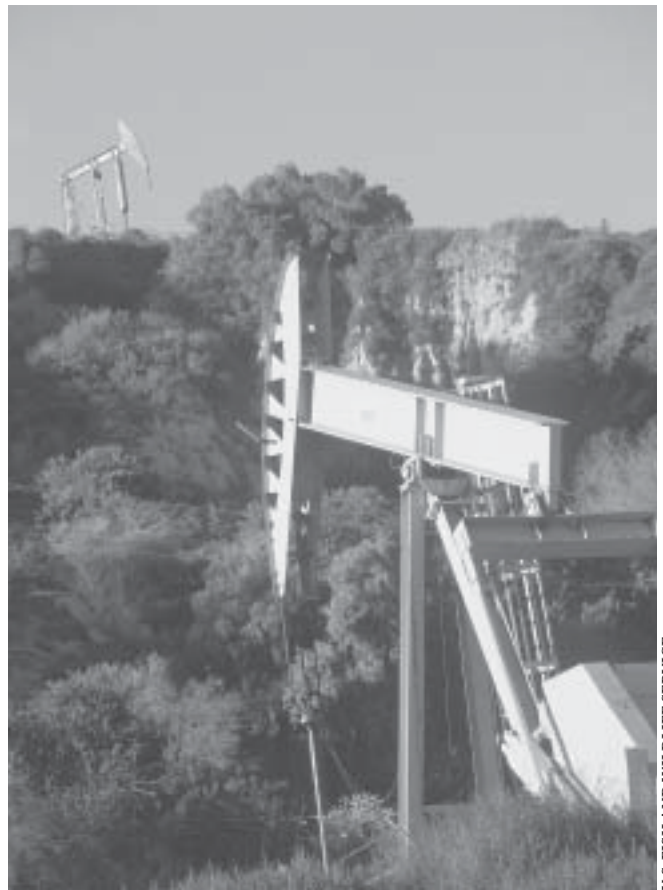
## *Bush Administration's Environmental Rollbacks Intensified in 2003*

### **SIERRA NEVADA FRAMEWORK**

In this year's most sweeping threat, all 11 national forests in the Sierra Nevada immediately face large increases in commercial logging from the Bush Administration's newest environmental rollback, aimed directly at California. After a perfunctory public comment period in 2003, in January 2004 the U.S. Forest Service revoked its own 2001 Sierra Nevada Forest Plan Amendment — the historic "Sierra Framework" that protects old-growth forests and wildlife throughout the Sierra — substituting a weaker plan that lets timber companies more easily log the last ancient forests in our state's greatest mountain range. Opposed by California's governor, resources agency, and U.S. senators, the Bush Administration's revisions weaken



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*The Forest Service proposes new oil drilling in endangered California condor habitat in the Los Padres National Forest.*

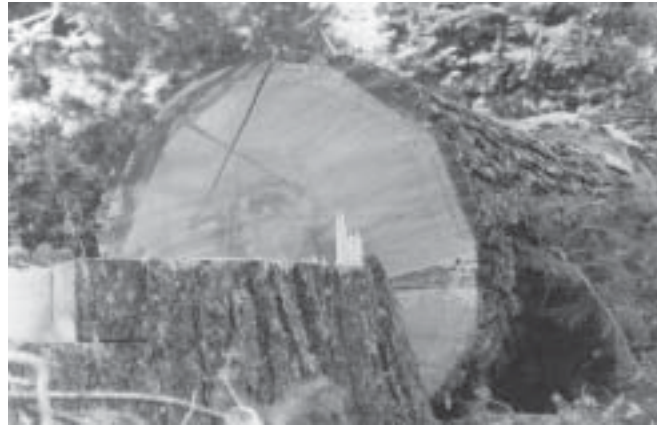
wildlife protection, eliminate protection for old-growth groves, and instead allow widespread commercial logging, projected to nearly triple the volume of logging in the Sierra.



*"In this year's most sweeping threat, all 11 national forests in the Sierra Nevada immediately face large increases in commercial logging..."*

#### **ROADLESS AREA CONSERVATION RULE**

Four of this year's 10 areas are in danger from the Bush Administration's ongoing attempt to gut another Forest Service policy: the Roadless Area Conservation Rule. This landmark conservation measure, adopted in 2000 but suspended by the current administration, protects the last wild national forest lands — including 4.4 million acres in California — from development, logging, and road-building. In 2003 the Bush Administration exempted Alaska's national forests from the rule, and announced a new plan to eliminate the rule in the lower 48.



*In January the Bush Administration revoked a key Forest Service policy to boost commercial logging in the entire Sierra Nevada, even in old-growth forests.*

If enforced, the Roadless Rule will save threatened wildlands of the Los Padres National Forest, Cleveland National Forest, Golden Trout Wilderness Addition (Rincon Roadless Area on the Sequoia National Forest), and Medicine Lake Highlands (Mount Hoffman Roadless Area on the Modoc and Klamath National Forests). Without the rule, these areas are in imminent danger of logging or energy development.

#### **OTHER REVERSALS IN CALIFORNIA**

The Bush Administration has reversed many other federal policies specific to California, stripping away hard-won protections and approving harmful projects. The Department of the Interior approved industrial power plants in the Medicine Lake

### *California's 10 Most Threatened Wild Places in 2004 are:*

**Sierra Nevada Forests** — Bush Administration has revoked Forest Service's Sierra Framework; substitute plan will allow widespread logging throughout the Sierra, even old-growth areas. Private company's plan to clearcut its own 1 million acres is further degrading water and habitat for rare wildlife.

**Algodones Sand Dunes** — Bush Administration's extreme off-road plan would overturn protection of endangered wildlife and wilderness.

**White Mountains (Furnace Creek)** — California's largest unprotected wilderness is being invaded by illegal off-road vehicle trails damaging a rare desert stream.

**Cleveland National Forest** — Proposed freeways, dams, and power lines threaten region's last unprotected wild forests.

**Tejon Ranch** — Sprawl and industrial development threaten irreplaceable wildlife habitat on California's largest private landholding.

**Los Padres National Forest** — Proposed oil and gas development puts wild forest lands and endangered species habitat at risk.

**Giant Sequoia National Monument** — Forest Service's plan would continue intensive logging in a protected monument, even cutting century-old sequoias.

**Golden Trout Wilderness Addition** — Salvage logging in roadless area would damage proposed wilderness that's home to California's imperiled state fish.

**Medicine Lake Highlands** — Development of geothermal power plants would lay waste to wild forests and sacred lands.

**Klamath River Basin** — Excessive water diversion is killing salmon and hurting farmers, fishermen, tribes, and endangered wildlife.

Highlands near Mount Shasta which were rejected by the previous administration. Similarly, it is re-opening vast areas of the fragile Algodones Dunes which were previously closed to vehicles to protect endangered species. And in 2002 it overruled its own federal scientists and cut back Klamath River flows, killing more than 34,000 salmon in Northern California. The Forest Service, having dispensed with the Sierra Framework, is now stripping key protections from the Northwest Forest Plan that protect northern California's ancient forests and salmon.

California's endangered species have been hard hit. In 2002 alone, Bush Administration officials slashed critical habitat for the threatened California red-legged frog, coastal California gnatcatcher, Alameda whipsnake, San Diego and Riverside fairy shrimp, and 19 endangered or threatened species of Pacific salmon and steelhead. They denied any protection for the imperiled Yosemite toad and California spotted owl under the Endangered Species Act. And today they propose to drill for oil in the Los Padres National Forest where the critically endangered California condor struggles to evade extinction.

### *Wilderness, Wildlands, and Wildlife Habitat*

California conservationists are working hard to protect many of these threatened places as national wilderness areas before they are lost. The California Wild Heritage Act currently proposed in the U.S. Congress would permanently protect the wild Los Padres National Forest, White Mountains, Golden Trout Wilderness Addition, parts of the Klamath River Basin, and many other wild public lands so that future generations can enjoy them as we do today.

Unfortunately, some of our most threatened public wildlands are not being formally considered for wilderness protection. In Southern California, the last roadless lands on the Cleveland National Forest could soon be lost forever to new freeways, hydroelectric projects and power lines. In the unprotected wilderness of the Algodones Dunes, rare species are losing a battle with rampant off-road vehicle abuse.

Some of our state's endangered wilds are not public lands at all. The vast privately owned Tejon Ranch in Southern California is now being fragmented by urban development, while the corporate forestlands of the Westside Sierra Nevada are being fragmented by clearcut logging. In each case, conservationists have identified large private landholdings as critical for preserving California's wildlife migration corridors and biodiversity, and this fragmentation threatens wildlife and waters belonging to all Californians. Yet these key habitat lands cannot be saved by an act of Congress; preserving them will require strong coordinated action by state and local governments, concerned citizens and organizations, and the corporations responsible for these lands.

### *Recommendations*

While specific recommendations for each threatened area are found in the full report, there are several general measures that would greatly increase protection for threatened wildlands in California:



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*Federal logging proposals in Giant Sequoia National Monument and the Golden Trout Wilderness Addition threaten habitat for imperiled wildlife, including the Pacific fisher and California's state fish, the golden trout.*

- Congress should designate wilderness areas on deserving public lands in California. Wilderness designation is the strongest protection available under law, and the only means to ensure that wild lands are permanently protected for future generations. The California Wild Heritage Act, introduced by Senator Barbara Boxer and Representatives Mike Thompson and Hilda Solis, would preserve many additional wilderness areas and wild and scenic rivers on California's federal public lands.
- The U.S. Forest Service should uphold the Roadless Area Conservation Rule and find compatible ways to use forest resources without fragmenting and destroying the nation's last wild forest ecosystems.
- The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service should complete the listing of threatened and endangered species, and the designation of critical habitat for them, as required by law. A "moratorium" on listing species is a recipe for extinction.
- Local land use planners should plan regionally, across political boundaries, to channel urban growth in ways that conserve threatened wildlife habitat and the connecting linkages vital to individual species and local ecosystems.

# About This Report

California is renowned for its vibrant wilderness areas, from the snowy High Sierra to the great redwood forests to the scenic California desert. These special places provide refuge for California's native wildlife and recreation opportunities for millions, and are a vital part of our natural heritage and quality of life.

The California Wilderness Coalition represents some 4,600 individuals and 200 conservation groups and businesses who seek to protect and restore California's wild places, so that future generations may enjoy them as we do today. With this annual report we aim to bring to your attention *California's 10 Most Threatened Wild Places* in 2004 — wildlands of statewide significance, in jeopardy of damage or destruction this year.

Each year the California Wilderness Coalition staff, working with our many partner conservation organizations, reviews threatened wildlands throughout California and chooses the 10 most threatened based on the following criteria:

**Severity:** What is the severity of the problem and the permanence of the damage?

**Urgency:** Does the problem pose an immediate threat to an area or will it slowly degrade an area over time?

**Impact:** How will the threats impact the wildlands? Do the threats include one or several of the following: logging, mining, urban development, oil and gas development, road-building, off-road vehicle use, water development and diversion?

**Significance:** What is the ecological, cultural or historical significance of the area? Does the area contain threatened or endangered species?

**Fragmentation:** Are the wildlands becoming increasingly fragmented, resulting in both geographic and ecological isolation?



DANIEL R. PATTERSON

*California's largest unprotected wilderness, the White Mountains are home to rare desert ecosystems. Creeks here are being damaged by illegal off-road vehicle trails.*



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Your active participation is greatly needed to preserve these special places from threats that would permanently damage or destroy their wild character. For more information on how to get involved to help protect California's most threatened wild places, see the "What You Can Do" section regarding each place. Unless more citizens get involved to help save these imperiled wildlands, we will continue to lose precious places that should be cherished for generations to come.