Protecting Wild Places in the Inyo Forest Plan

The Inyo National Forest in California features some of the most iconic wild places in the eastern Sierra Nevada. In late 2017, the Forest Service will release a final plan for these 1.9 million acres of public lands that will determine which wild places are recommended as Wilderness and which streams are eligible for Wild and Scenic River protection. Many of these wild places will provide refuge and critical migration corridors for plants and animals to survive climate change. CalWild advocates for the protection of the following wild places in the Inyo Forest Plan:

Glass Mountain (17,444+ acres) – Located in Mono County, this potential wilderness forms the northeastern rampart of the Long Valley Caldera. The spring-fed creeks, abundant meadows, and aspen groves in this desert region is sustained by Pacific moisture that streams through a low point in the high Sierra crest. The area supports part of the largest Jeffrey pine forest in the world, uniquely mixed with pinyon, mountain mahogany, lodgepole, limber, and whitebark pine. Sagebrush steppes, steep-walled canyons, and high volcanic ridges add to the area’s ecological diversity, which includes ecosystems under-represented in the Wilderness System. The entire area is an important migratory corridor for wildlife and plants between the Sierra Nevada, White Mountains, and Great Basin Desert. The threatened Lahontan cutthroat trout was recently established in O’Harrel Canyon and the area supports the sensitive sage grouse. Steep topography provides outstanding opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation. Most of the area is trail-less, but a user-created trail from Sawmill Meadow provides access to Glass Mountain’s scenic summit.

Ansel Adams Wilderness Northeast Addition (7,212+ acres) – Located in Mono County, this potential addition to the Ansel Adams Wilderness encompasses the eastern Sierra Nevada escarpment between Lee Vining and
June Lake. The area supports diverse forests of Jeffrey and limber pine, red and white fir, mountain mahogany, pinyon-juniper woodlands, and meadow-side aspens. Sierra Nevada bighorn sheep and sage grouse inhabit the area. Parker, Walker, and Gibbs Creeks flow through the addition, offering wildlife migration routes between the high country and the Mono Lake Basin. The entire addition offers excellent opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation, including hiking on existing trails, cross-country exploration, and hunting.

**Dexter Canyon (13,014+ acres)** – Located in Mono County, this potential wilderness is dominated by the deeply incised canyons of Dexter and its tributary canyons. These perennial streams rise from large meadows and flow through a landscape of eroded granite knobs, rolling uplands, and flat volcanic mesas. Diverse conifer species, snowbank aspen groves, sagebrush steppes, and streamside willows and meadows support a wide variety of wildlife. The area supports ecosystems under-represented in the Wilderness System and provides important migratory routes for wildlife and plants between the Sierra Nevada and Great Basin. Most of the area is trail-less, providing excellent opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation, including hiking and hunting.

**Lee Vining Creek (15.4+ miles)** – Located in Mono County, the Forest Service found nearly 11 miles of this creek to be eligible for Wild & Scenic River protection due to its outstanding scenic, recreation, and geological values. Fed by melting ice from the Conness Glacier, Lee Vining Creek flows south and east to Mono Lake through a spectacularly glaciated canyon rimmed by dramatic granite peaks. Much of the creek is paralleled by Highway 120 and the entire canyon is a popular gateway for national and international visitors to Yosemite National Park and the Mono Basin National Scenic Area. Popular backcountry trails provide access to the stream’s upper reaches, while numerous campgrounds are found in its middle section. CalWild believes that the lower six miles of creek, including the segment within the Mono Basin Scenic Area, is also eligible and that the creek possesses outstanding historical values associated with the former gold mining town of Bennetville and the precedent-setting legal decision that re-watered the lower creek and help save Mono Lake.

**Hot Creek (3.5 miles)** – The Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) identified this creek in Mono County as an eligible Wild & Scenic River due to its outstanding scenic, recreational, fish, and ecological values. A state designated Wild Trout Stream, Hot Creek is a popular destination for tourists to view boiling hot springs (a remnant of the Long Valley Caldera) and fish for wild trout, in a wild setting framed by the magnificent Sierra escarpment to the west and Glass Mountain to the east.

**Rock Creek (~22 miles)** – The Forest Service and the BLM identified this creek in Mono County as an eligible Wild & Scenic River due to its outstanding scenic, recreational, wild trout fishery, and ecological values. More than 18 campgrounds, picnic areas, trailheads, and other recreational facilities make Rock Creek one of the most popular recreation destinations in the eastern Sierra. The lower portion of the creek cuts through the Volcanic Tablelands, where a non-motorized trail offers great hiking and mountain biking opportunities.

**Lone Pine Creek (10+ miles)** – The Forest Service determined this creek in Inyo County eligible for Wild & Scenic River protection due to its outstanding scenery
and recreational values. The view up Lone Pine Creek is dominated by Mt. Whitney, which attracts visitors from throughout the world. The popular Lone Pine Campground and the Mt. Whitney National Recreation Trail provide access to the lower creek, which ultimately flows into the scenic Alabama Hills. CalWild believes that 2-3 miles of the lower creek on BLM lands in the Alabama Hills is also eligible, and that the creek possesses outstanding historical value due to the Mt. Whitney Trail, which was originally constructed to provide research access for scientists to the highest peak in the lower United States.

**White Mountains Wilderness Additions (10,329 acres)** – When the White Mountains Wilderness was established by Congress in 2009, its southern section in Inyo County was left out. This addition corrects that mistake and adds wild lands that include ecosystems under-represented in the Wilderness System and that provide an important wildlife migration corridor between the White and Inyo Mountains. The area supports sage grouse, ancient bristlecone pines, and the rare Booth’s evening primrose. It also provides excellent opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation.

**Deep Springs North (34,164 acres)** – A primitive road separates this area from the White Mountains potential wilderness additions to the north. As such, this wild place is part of the critical wildlife migration connection between the White and Inyo Mountains. It also includes ecosystems unrepresented in the Wilderness System. The area is home to one of the few black toad populations outside of Deep Springs Valley and it also supports ancient bristlecone pines and the sensitive Townsend’s big-eared bat. A unique feature is the Birch Creek granite batholith, which is surrounded by sedimentary formations. The area provides primitive and unconfined recreation opportunities.

**Piper Mountain Wilderness Addition (14,518 acres)** – Separated from the potential White Mountains additions and Deep Springs North by the Highway 168 corridor, this area also includes under-represented ecosystems and an important migration corridor between the White and Inyo Mountains. The area also supports several rare and endemic plants. Sensitive cultural resources are found in the area, which would add significant acreage to the BLM’s existing Piper Mountain Wilderness.

**Inyo Mountains Addition (4,840 acres)** – Separated from the Piper Mountain Addition by the Eureka Valley Road, this potential addition to the Inyo Wilderness will provide critical connectivity for migrating wildlife between the White and Inyo Mountains. It also includes ecosystems under-represented in the Wilderness and supports several rare and endemic plants. Marble Canyon is a unique geological feature in the area. This wild place offers primitive and unconfined recreation.

**South Sierra Wilderness Addition (17,622 acres)** – This eastern addition to the South Sierra Wilderness includes rich riparian habitat in scenic Haiwee Canyon. The addition includes ecosystems under-represented in the Wilderness System and is home to Sierra Nevada bighorn sheep, Kern slender salamander, and rare plants. It also provides an important wildlife migration corridor between the Sierra Nevada and Mojave Desert and offers opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation.