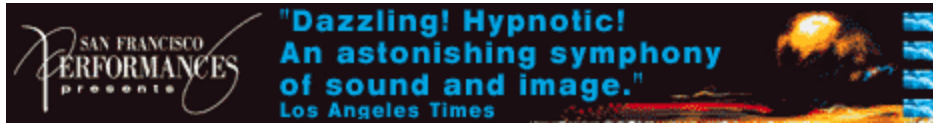


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Paul McHugh, Chronicle Outdoors Writer

Thursday, October 3, 2002

**San Francisco Chronicle**[CHRONICLE SECTIONS](#)

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Some real estate cliches apply amazingly well to wilderness.

The first: "It's valuable because they're not making it anymore."

More wilderness can't be made -- not unless you can afford to wait a few millennia while Nature does her thing. Currently, the progression seems headed the other way. The global roster of pristine acreage plummets daily.

The second cliché: "Three important factors to consider are location, location and location."

Many large wildernesses have already been designated in the United States. Now, advocates are pushing to add key, adjacent parcels, to promote integrity of watersheds, biomes and wildlife corridors. However, such sites often have competing visions for their use. Hence, to achieve an effective consensus, any selection and negotiation process must take considerable pains.

Sen. Barbara Boxer's current California wilderness bill may not be a last chance to pick more wild preserves. However, it could well be a last big chance.

Whether you're pro-wilderness, anti-, or undecided, the next six months offer a window of opportunity for you to visit some of these sites, assess their value as a wildlife zone, and evaluate their suitability for various human uses.

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The California Wild Heritage Act of 2002, introduced in May, has not even won its first committee hearing, much less reached a vote. Most recently, Congress' attention has been engaged with more pressing matters, such as whether to rain havoc upon Iraq.

Even should ecology migrate onto the agenda before the end of this Congressional session, priority topics such as the Bush administration's proposal to reduce fire hazard in national forests by halting environmental review and legal appeals for "thinning" timber harvests, will likely win discussion first.

Still, behind the scenes, quiet negotiations are under way between Boxer's office and staffers for California's senior senator, Dianne Feinstein.

"This bill's chances are way better if both our state senators team up on it," says Tina Andolina, a conservation associate for the nonprofit, California Wilderness Coalition (CWC) in Davis. "Feinstein's indicated she's inclined to support something, maybe not everything. She sits on the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, the first place this bill would be heard."

A sketch of the proposal's history begins with launch of the CWC's Wild Heritage Campaign, two years ago. While evaluating 7.4 million California roadless areas for new wilderness, CWC claims it consulted local stakeholders, even potential opponents to designation. Then, CWC whittled down its wish list to 4.5 million acres and took it to Boxer.

According to Boxer's deputy state director, Tom Bohigian, that consultation and whittling process has continued -- and shall continue until the bill is likely reintroduced in 2003. Its current total of new proposed wilderness on federal lands in California stands at 2.5 million acres.

"This (proposed bill) was never looked upon as a 50-yard dash," Bohigian said. "We hope it won't be a marathon, either. Given the calendar, and the way things are, it's probably going to be more like a 400-meter event."

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Proposed wilderness additions roam the state.

The greatest collection of sites, nearly two dozen, which total more than 500,000 acres, are scattered through National Forests in Southern California, as well as Bureau of Land Management desert lands.

The Sierra would get 330,000 new wilderness acres in about a dozen sites. These primarily add to popular, already-designated areas like Carson-Iceberg, Emigrant, Golden Trout, Domeland and Granite Chief.

In the Coast Range, the Marble Mountains, Trinity Alps, Snow Mountain, the Yolla Bollyes and Ventana wildernesses would all score a boost in turf.

The single most eye-popping proposal targets the high desert mountains east of Bishop. Here, land from the Inyo National Forest and the Bureau of Land Management would be combined in a big, brand-new White Mountains Wilderness that would encompass 297,000 acres (major road corridors would be left open).

Under current law, the 1964 Wilderness Act, the protected land is defined as, "an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor . . . retaining its primeval character and influence."

The law prohibits mechanical transportation, permanent roads and habitation,

but allows necessary measures to fight fire and disease, as well as some commercial activities such as mining, guiding, horse-packing and livestock grazing.

Because feedback on this bill still is being welcomed by both Boxer's and Feinstein's offices, the stage is set for examination and evaluation of parcels by everyone from miners to mountain bikers, backpackers to bear hunters. It's an opportunity to do your bit to help shape California's future. Not only that - it provides a grand excuse for concocting an outing.

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A list of parcels can be found at [www.calwild.org/places/index.php](http://www.calwild.org/places/index.php). When you click on the state maps this Web site provides, you're given a list of potential wilderness names; click on those, and you're given local contacts that can assist you in planning a hike or tour.

California's inventory of currently designated wilderness includes: 4.3 million acres on National Forest Land (plus another 114,700 acres of wild lands in Wild and Scenic River corridors, managed similarly); 3.6 million acres in federal Bureau of Land Management (BLM) holdings; 5.9 million acres in National Parks; and 9,172 acres on U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service refuges. Also, there's 435,000 acres of wilderness in California State Parks -- a chunk often ignored in tallies.

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