



Northwest California Wilderness, Recreation, and Working Forests Act

Rep. Jared Huffman

Frequently Asked Questions

Economic impacts

Q: How would this legislation benefit tourism and our local economies?

A: While every county has its own set of unique opportunities, numerous studies show that protected federal lands, such as wilderness, national parks, or national monuments are important economic assets that attract people and businesses as well as new jobs and income. For example, Western counties with permanent protections on federal land support above-average rates of job growth and are correlated with higher levels of per capita income. Outdoor recreation generates \$92 billion in consumer spending, 691,000 direct jobs, and \$6.2 billion in state and local tax revenue in California each year. In the 2nd Congressional District alone, residents spend \$1.93 billion on outdoor recreation each year.

The areas identified for protection in this bill would become destination locations and contribute to our local tourism and recreation economies by visitors eating in our restaurants, shopping in our markets, and staying in our local lodging.

Q: How would the bill affect tax revenues that fund local government?

A: Because there is no new federal land created by this bill, there is no loss of property tax revenues to local government. The bill is expected to have a positive impact on local tax revenues because of increased economic activity and sales tax revenues associated with recreation, tourism, logging, restoration projects, and potentially the construction of a visitor center in Trinity County and lodges in or near Redwood National Park.

Q: Would the public land protections in this bill result in less logging and timber production in our region?

A: The net effect of the bill on the forest products industry is positive. That's because the bill, for the first time, prioritizes fuel reduction projects (including logging) for forest health, fire resilience, and restoration on over 232,000 acres of federal land in Trinity and Humboldt counties near private lands, along roads, and in other strategic locations. This would result in the production of lumber and other forest products.

Q: What about the Wilderness designations – won't that mean less logging?

A: Very few of the bill's proposed new wilderness areas involve land currently open to logging, and virtually none of it involves timberland where logging has recently been proposed or where it could realistically be expected to happen. Specifically, of the 259,216 acres of Forest Service-managed lands proposed in the bill for wilderness and potential wilderness designation, only 11,223 acres are open to logging and capable of being logged under existing rules. That represents just 2.5% of the 449,040 acres that are both tentatively suitable for, and open to, logging on U.S. Forest Service lands in Del Norte, Humboldt, Mendocino, and Trinity Counties.

Since the Northwest Forest Plan and Roadless Area Conservation Rule went into effect in 1994 and 2002, respectively, roadless area logging has been greatly reduced from the levels of the 1970s and 1980s, when 84,000 acres were harvested. No roadless areas have been successfully logged since 1989 and none have even been proposed for logging since 1996. Some additional detail:

- **The proposed Chancelulla wilderness area** has not been proposed for logging since 1989, when it was portion salvage logged in 1989. The logged portion is not included in the proposed wilderness additions.
- **The proposed Trinity Alps wilderness additions** have not been proposed for logging since 1996, and no logging resulted from that proposal.
- **The proposed Siskiyou wilderness additions** have not been proposed for logging since 1989. While some logging occurred, the logged portion is not included in the proposed wilderness additions.

Q: How would mining be impacted?

A: Existing mining claims could still be developed under the legislation, but the staking of new mining claims would be prohibited in areas designated as Wilderness or as Wild & Scenic rivers.

Environmental Benefits

Q: What does Wild & Scenic River status mean?

A: Federal land management agencies must develop management plans along protected river segments *only* on public lands. The Wild & Scenic designation also prohibits the federal government from licensing, permitting, or funding new hydroelectric dams or major diversions on protected stream segments.

Q: What are the benefits of Wilderness? Why protect these places?

A: Designating an area as wilderness recognizes the unique values of that area and ensures that logging, mining, road construction, or other development will not take place in exceptionally wild stretches of public land. Wilderness designation is a guarantee under federal law that the land will remain just as it is today. There are other areas of federal land open to development, while wild places are few and far between.

The areas proposed for wilderness possess a range of unique characteristics including the largest most intact swath of unprotected ancient forest in California in the proposed Chinquapin Wilderness, the habitat for rare and endangered plant and animal species such as the northern spotted owl, goshawk, fisher, and marten of the proposed Chancelulla Wilderness additions, and the extensive recreation opportunities in the proposed English Ridge Wilderness, to name a few.

Wilderness designation provides the following:

- Places to see vestiges of wild California and get away from the hustle and bustle of daily life
- Old-growth forests, healthy streams, and other rare features protected in perpetuity
- Scenic vistas
- Clean water
- Outstanding plant and wildlife habitat
- Hunting and fishing with less competition from people who stick to the roads
- Opportunities for solitude

Q: Does the proposal address trespass marijuana grows?

A: The bill addresses the need for cleaning up public lands and waters impacted by trespass marijuana grows by creating a local, state, federal, and tribal partnership to coordinate activities and provide resources and expertise.

Q: How would this legislation help fish?

A: The bill would protect the watersheds, headwaters, rivers, and streams that fish rely on, preserving the clean, cold water they need to survive. It also contains provisions to restore water quality and aquatic habitat within the South Fork Trinity River watershed, a vital fishery.

Fire Safety

Q: How would the bill impact fire management?

A: It would help protect communities by creating a network of roadside shaded fuel breaks in the South Fork Trinity-Mad River Restoration Area, including thinning neglected plantations. The bill would also require the U.S. Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to work with local residents to create a new coordinated fire management plan for all of the designated Wilderness Areas in the region.

Q: How would the bill help protect communities from wildfire?

A: The bill would increase community and firefighter safety by prioritizing projects that reduce fuels by selective harvest, especially roadside shaded fuel breaks and plantation thinning. The bill also ensures that all fire-suppression tools remain available to land managers.

Q: Does designating wilderness lead to increased fire risk?

A: Fire suppression is allowed in wilderness areas, including the use of heavy equipment and aircraft if necessary. Most of the fires ignited in Trinity County are associated with roads, trails, campgrounds, and human habitation. Most of the large fires that burned into or threatened communities and forest management areas in Trinity County in recent decades (up to 2003) were ignited in roaded areas by humans. Lightning ignitions have been scattered throughout the county but are locally concentrated and primarily outside of the proposed areas.

Q: Does Wild & Scenic River protection affect fighting wildfires?

A: No, federal and state fire agencies may do whatever is necessary to protect life and property. Typically, fire agencies tend to avoid active fire-fighting operations in the steep inner gorges of all rivers and streams, including those protected as Wild & Scenic.

Property Rights and Public Access

Q: Would the bill create more public lands or affect private property?

A: This bill does not create any additional public lands; it deals entirely with lands already owned by the federal government and would have no practical impact on private property.

Wilderness designation *only* applies to federal public lands. The legislation would protect existing federal public lands from all development, including the construction of new roads. The right to use and access private land will not be impacted and existing, legal landowner road access will not be impacted.

Wild and Scenic River designation gives no federal authority over private land use or local zoning of private lands, and there is no practical impact on private property. Federal protection does provide an indirect positive impact as it typically increases private property values and contributes to the local economy by attracting tourists and recreational visitors. While California state forestry regulations establishes a 200 foot wide “special treatment area” on private lands along state and federally designated rivers to protect riparian habitat and water quality, the intensity of logging proposed for the special treatment area is entirely up to the registered professional forester that submits the timber harvest plan.

Q: Does the bill impact water rights?

A: Existing water rights on federal waters will not be impacted by wilderness designation or Wild and Scenic River designation. The state's authority to regulate water rights remains. In practice, none of the federally protected rivers in California have affected the operation of upstream and downstream dams and other water facilities. If you have a right to draft water now from a river, that right remains after Wild and Scenic River designation. Some existing federal management plans place restrictions on water draft to ensure that no more than 50% of the stream flow is removed from the river.

Q: Would the bill close roads to the public?

A: No. All legally open roads would remain open. The proposed wilderness areas do not currently have any legally-open roads included in them.

Q: Are you locking-up federal lands and reducing public access?

A: No, just the opposite. Hunting and fishing are regulated by the State of California. Wilderness or Wild and Scenic River designation do not change these rules.

In addition to not closing any currently open roads, the bill preserves access for recreational uses, including hunting, fishing, bird watching, horseback riding, hiking, backpacking, camping, swimming, rafting, kayaking, and canoeing, in areas where those activities are currently allowed. The bill expands and improves recreational opportunities by requiring a recreation trail study, mountain bike trail study in Del Norte County, a Trinity Lake trail study, and by authorizing visitor centers in Del Norte and Trinity Counties.

Q: How would off-highway vehicle (OHV) use be impacted?

A: No roads or trails would be closed to OHV use by the legislation. OHV users would benefit from several aspects of the bill, including the required recreation trails study that would investigate both motorized and non-motorized recreation opportunities.

Other questions

Q: Why protect more land when we can't take care of the parks and wilderness areas that we already have?

A: The under-funding of public lands is a serious problem that must be addressed by Congress with or without this bill. All of the areas covered by the bill are already in federal ownership. The bill does include provisions that should help, such as making it easier for non-federal partners to assist with trail and campground maintenance and other important upkeep efforts, and the local retention of fees associated with certain logging activities. The restoration of degraded areas, and the permanent protection of unique public lands, is still a wise, long-term investment to protect important ecosystems and increase recreational and economic opportunities.

Q: How would the bill affect Native American Tribal uses of public lands?

A: Native American cultural practices such as the holding of ceremonies and the gathering of basketry materials are fully protected by the bill.