



FORESTS FOREVER

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Northern California Coastal Heritage Act clears committee *Thompson bill would preserve vast tracts of priceless wilderness*

A bill that would extend wilderness protection to more than 275,000 acres of federal lands in Northern California recently cleared the Resources Committee in the U.S. House of Representatives. It could come up for a vote on the floor of the House as early as next week.

The Northern California Coastal Wild Heritage Act (H.R. 233) is sponsored by Rep. Mike Thompson (D-CA). Sens. Barbara Boxer (D-CA) and Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) introduced a companion bill, S. 128, in the Senate, where it was passed unanimously on July 26, 2005.

“California’s wild lands are continually threatened by logging, mining, real estate development and— in recent years— by an administration in Washington hostile to environmental protections of virtually any kind,” said Paul Hughes, executive director of Forests Forever.

“That is why it is so important that we have a bill like Rep. Thompson’s that will afford the comprehensive protection of wilderness to some of the state’s most precious landscapes.”

The measure would preserve significant parcels of land in the north state, including the King Range on the Lost Coast, the Cedar Roughs wilderness, the Cache Creek area, and an expansion of the Yolla Bolly-Middle Eel Wilderness. The Black Butte River would be designated as a wild and scenic river.

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As part of a compromise, some 25,000 acres of federal land in Del Norte and Humboldt counties, most of it in Six Rivers National Forest, has been excluded from the Thompson bill. H.R. 233 also added 79,000 acres of Bureau of Land Management land in Mendocino County for use by off-road vehicles and mountain bikes. These changes were made to allay concerns expressed by Del Norte and Humboldt county officials over the amount of wilderness proposed there, and to address the complaints of off-road vehicle and mountain bike groups over losing access to trails on wilderness lands.

The act was originally part of Boxer's California Wild Heritage bill, which would protect some 2.5 million acres of wilderness and 22 wild and scenic rivers. Another part of this legislation was passed in 2002, giving wilderness protection to more than 57,000 acres of federal forests in Monterey and San Benito counties, including land added to the Ventana Wilderness near Big Sur.

"The forests and rivers that would be protected by the Thompson bill are home to bears, eagles, elk, northern spotted owls, California brown pelicans, steelhead and salmon," Hughes said "They provide clean drinking water, and afford the irreplaceable experience of a landscape unaltered by human beings. By giving these lands wilderness protection, we will ensure that our children can experience wild California."

If passed by the House, the bill would go to the Senate and be voted on before the end of the session in October.

"Forests Forever would like to thank Rep. Thompson and senators Boxer and Feinstein for introducing this legislation and pushing it forward," Hughes said.