

Does Siskiyou County Need a National Monument?

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There was a recent opinion discussing the positive benefits of creating a National Monument north of the Klamath River. The message never did clearly articulate why a National Monument designation would benefit or provide additional opportunities for the citizens of Siskiyou County. The official name on the Klamath Siskiyou Wildlands Center (KSWild) web site identifies this proposal as the “Siskiyou Crest National Monument – Americas First Climate Refuge”. The proposal encompasses approximately 600,000 acres. The proposal runs north of the Klamath River with an eastern boundary of Beaver Creek, near the community of Klamath River, to a western boundary of Clear Creek west of Happy Camp. It runs north well into Oregon.

These preservationist groups claim they want a “meaningful protection and restoration strategy” yet they fail to allow the Klamath National Forest to manage lands in a way that meets these objectives if the management is not deemed acceptable by them. The author states this large land area “remains largely unprotected.” Let’s look at the current management direction for a majority of this area that is located within Siskiyou County. There are approximately 205,500 acres of Siskiyou County National Forest land within the proposal. The current designations include approximately 59,000 acres of Wilderness and Backcountry (29%), 101,000 acres of Special Wildlife Habitat (Late Successional Reserve-Special Habitat, Threatened and Endangered Species) (49%), 7,000 acres of Special Management Areas for Sensitive Plant Species, Areas of Archeological Significance, and Special Wildlife Species (3%), Wild and Scenic Rivers (3%), and 32,500 acres of Riparian Reserve (16%). All of these designations currently limit or do not allow vegetation manipulation. The ability to conduct prescribed burning, grazing, vehicle access, timber harvesting, hunting, and firewood gathering vary by each type of designation. As one can see 100% of the existing land base currently has set protection measures for all of the issues raised in Mr. Sutherlin’s letter.

The opinion also stated the designation of a National Monument would allow for “active management and even the potential of *scientifically* informed commercial thinning.” Just what is “*scientifically* informed commercial thinning?” One gets the impression commercial thinning has no science behind it. Commercial thinning is one of the most researched harvest methods. Hundreds of publications over the last half century have documented the benefits of commercial thinning, if done correctly. The unfortunate thing is groups such as KSWild oppose commercial thinning when done to the correct level. KSWild and their cohort opposition groups continually challenge community protection projects within Siskiyou County that propose **only** commercial thinning. In the last two years they have objected to commercial thinning projects designed to protect the communities of Happy Camp, Hamburg, Seiad Valley, Petersburg, and Sawyers Bar. Does one think a National Monument designation is going to increase the potential for more commercial thinning? We think not!

The opinion piece uses the word “should” naively, since the creation of a Monument is a Presidential Proclamation and activities allowed within National Monument designated lands are contingent on the proclamation and there is no oversight by Congress in what’s stated in the proclamation. This leaves one with the feeling the word “would” will never occur once the designation is made. KSWild’s website states the reason for the Monument is to protect the land from logging, grazing, the Applegate Dam, road construction, and OHV use. If the National Park Service were the lead agency overseeing the National Monument designation, as is proposed by KSWild, their management philosophy is incompatible with vegetation management, firewood cutting, hunting, OHV use and mineral extraction. These activities would not be allowed to continue. Grazing maybe allowed, although, activities and practices are typically curtailed to meet the new objectives listed by the National Monument status. Responsible forest management on federal lands can be curtailed entirely if the proclamation simply states that any “feature” of the Monument not be removed. In some National Monuments, water rights have to be curtailed to ensure that adequate water is present for National Monument objectives.

It was also stated that “one hundred percent of the lands we are discussing are federally managed already.” That is not completely true. There are thousands of acres of private land located within the proposed National Monument designation. Even part of the community of Happy Camp is

encompassed within the map found on the KSWild web site. Future management on private lands *can* be curtailed on private lands within a Monument if the use is deemed incompatible to the Monuments purpose. Monument protection objectives are the overriding criteria for uses within a National Monument designation.

Lessons Learned: Take a look at what has happened since the designation of the Cascade Siskiyou National Monument just over the Siskiyou County border in Oregon. This National Monument encompasses approximately 53,000 acres. The management plan proposes thinning 5,000 acres (none done to date), grazing is being eliminated, does not allow Christmas tree or firewood cutting, and will close/decommission 74 miles of road. This would equate to 800 miles of road if the same percentage of roads were closed in the proposed National Monument.

It has been ten years since the Presidential Proclamation for the Giant Sequoia National Monument and still there is no approved management plan for this monument. This is due to litigation by the same groups who called for its creation. Subsequently no management has occurred within those boundaries for ten years. Will the same happen here?

Broken Promises: One only needs to look at past efforts to follow through with promises made on National Monument designations. The Giant Sequoia National Monument is one such example. During all the debates during the creation of this National Monument many “should's” were promised by groups pushing for establishment. One such promise included the ability to protect the Giant Sequoia groves by instituting commercial thinning of invading trees species. This was needed to reduce current fuel loadings to alleviate detrimental wildfire effects. Since monument establishment these groups have blocked all attempts to protect the Giant Sequoia groves.

The proponents state research shows that areas with large federally protected areas adjacent to communities have a more robust, diversified and sustainable economy. Where is the economic research for Siskiyou County? Since most of the federal lands within Siskiyou County over the last 20 years have had large areas protected, the economy has significantly declined.

Unemployment and welfare rates are at all time highs. Mills have closed. Working families have

left the area and schools are suffering with steep declines in enrollment and quality of education. The economy of this County certainly is not robust or diversified.

The proponents of the Monument state that the Monument needs to be designated in order to protect the environment from the perceived threats from public land sales, road building, private logging, cattle grazing, and off road vehicle use. They have, in a sense, stated that any human influence on the landscape is detrimental to the environment and thus they need to restrict activities which are historical to Siskiyou County and are the foundation of our rural economy. The proponents make the claim that jobs will be created by thinning projects and road decommissioning. However, when one looks to other National Monuments, we can see that in fact, thinning projects, as were proposed in the Giant Sequoia National Monument were vehemently opposed by the Sierra Club and are still held up in court till this day. Don't be misled to think that projects would go forth without additional controversy if the Monument status was designated on these lands.

We urge folks to look at past monument designations and see what limits have been instituted by proclamation within the monument. If things were on the straight and narrow, a Presidential Proclamation would not be needed and the normal process of going thru Congress to obtain a protective status would be sought.

Does Siskiyou County need a National Monument? For those who desire to use these lands for multiple use; including firewood cutting, mushroom gathering, hunting, roaded recreation, dispersed camping, grazing, vegetative management, private land rights **WE THINK NOT!**